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Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Related Natural Resources

Special Fishing Issue

It's time to get ready: haul out the tackle box and sort through it, choose your spot, map your tactics—and head for the water. It's time to fish... can spring be far behind?

It's time to get ready: browse through the pages of this special issue of Virginia Wildlife, devoted to fishing. Read about bamboo fly rods, trout fishing in the Blue Ridge, crappies in Lake Chesdin, gill netting in Tidewater. Find out how to preserve and prepare you catch for the table. Read about canoeing the fabled James River, with or without a rod. And check the eight bonus pages for useful tips and tidbits on everything from smoking fish to citation catches.

Then, get ready—for some memorable fishing.

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Florida bass by Ed Bierly, Lorton. This magnificent painting is available as a limited edition print. See page 34a for details.

Back cover: This year, Take a Kid Fishing Week is June 7—13. Photo by David Ryan.

Special Section



It All Comes Down To The Hook

by Jack Randolph

It makes no difference whether you are fishing from a mega-buck cabin cruiser, using a Space Age micro laser reel, a moron-boron rod and nylon-Dacron line impregnated with moon dust, or a cane pole fitted with cotton grocery twine: it all comes down to the hook. If you are using a dull hook, the wrong hook or one that is too large or

too small, you ain't gonna catch a whole lot of fish.

When you get right down to it, a boat isn't anything but transportation and the rod and reel and line aren't anything more than an extension of that transportation, all of which are put together with but one objective—to put a hook in front of a fish.

It doesn't make a whole lot of sense to go to all that trouble and expense if the hook you are using isn't up to the job, or for that matter, isn't the best hook you could possibly buy. Putting things in perspective, the best hook you could buy is far less expensive than many other ingredients of a fishing trip.

Aberdeen

Although you may not appreciate it at first glance, the subject of hooks is a mighty big one, too big to cover in one article, or the whole magazine, for that matter. But we'll take a shot at hitting the high points, putting out just enough hook logic to add a few pounds to the weight of your catch.

There are several manufacturers of quality fish hooks. We have quality hooks made right here in the good ol' U.S. of A., but there are also some mighty fine ones coming out of Norway and France. Although some dandy rods and reels are produced in the Far East, they haven't yet started putting out high quality hooks.

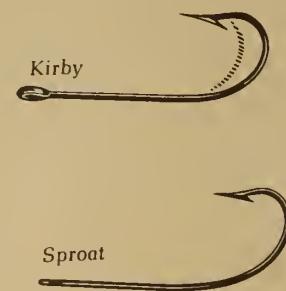
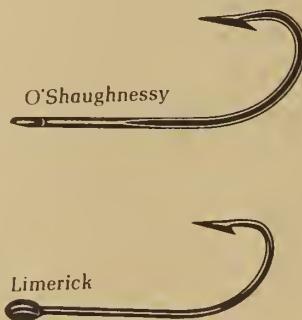
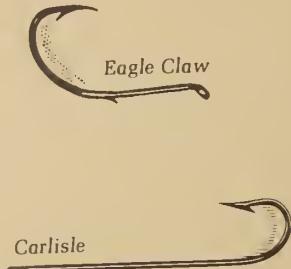
One small problem one encounters in fish hooks is that there is no ironclad standard. One maker's size 2 may be a bit larger or smaller than the other fellow's. In fact, a size 2 of one style may be larger than a size 2 of another, made by the same manufacturer. Just recently, I ordered a box of size 1 nickel plated treble hooks and a box of size 2 bronze treble hooks of a different style, and the 2's were larger than the 1's.

Hook sizes run from 28, the smallest, up to a giant forged shark hook with a six-inch gap. A size 28 is so tiny you can hardly see it. Some expert fly tiers use this tiny hook to create imitations of tiny, almost microscopic insects that trout snack on between meals.

The scale of hook sizes, starting with the smallest on the left, looks like this: 28, 26, 24, 22, 20, 18, 16, 14, 12, 10, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 1/0, 2/0, 3/0, 4/0, 5/0, 6/0,—to 15/0.

Fly tiers get more deeply into the business of hooks than most other folks. They often require hooks with special characteristics. For example, there may be a need for a size 8 hook that is heavier than the usual one. The required hook may be defined as a size 8 2X strong. This means that the hook should be made the strength of a hook 2 sizes larger. If, on the other hand, the tier wants to use a very light hook for a high floating dry fly, he may want it to be constructed of wire lighter than normal, hence he would order a No. 8 hook, 2X fine, meaning he wants a hook made of wire normally found in a hook two sizes smaller.

The same reasoning applies to shank



length. If a long-shanked hook is required to tie a streamer fly or a bucktail, he might ask for a No. 8 2X long. This is a number 8 hook with a shank normally found on a hook two sizes larger. Or, if he wants a hook with an exceptionally short shank, he may prescribe 2X short, which would be the size shank normally found on a hook two sizes smaller.

Complicated? You ain't seen nothin' yet! Hooks come made out of a variety of steels, with different types of eyes and a whole arsenal of points. Some will rust in salt water while other will not rust as easily. Some have slices in the shank to hold bait. Some have special bends for fishing plastic worms or for use in molds to make jigs. Others may have humps in the shank so they won't turn when used to make bass and bream bugs. In the interest of clarity and in the most profound hope that you won't quit reading the article at this point, we'll stop and return to the real live world and talk about the hooks most of us find useful fishing here in Virginia. Please take note that the particular brand or model numbers shown are not intended to favor one brand hook over another, but are mentioned to provide a point of reference to the reader.

For the freshwater fisherman, the choice of hooks is perhaps easier than for his salt water fishin' cousin. Let's take a look at the various species of fish and the hooks recommended for them. Incidentally, you may not agree with the following advice. It would be a miracle if you did, because one of the best ways I know to start an argument is to discuss hook sizes and styles with fishermen and shotgun shells with hunters. Yet, in complete charge and

control of my faculties, here goes.

FRESHWATER TROUT

Mustad Model 7948A in sizes 8 to 10. This is a turned down eye hook that is tied to the spinning line or leader. Can be broken when snagged which helps save tackle and time. For use with salmon eggs or corn try the Eagle Claw #38 in sizes 8 through 12. If you prefer a snelled hook, the ones with a short leader attached, try Eagle Claw's No. 51.

CRAPIE

Because crappie are so often found among submerged tree limbs where hooks become snagged, a hook that will bend and can be bent back to its original shape is desirable. Also, because the minnows used for bait are so small, a fine wire hook is required so as not to kill the minnows. Because of this, the aberdeen style hook is recommended. This is a long shank hook, available in gold or bronze. I like gold and size 4. Eagle Claw makes a snelled gold hook that is good in the Model 244, but ringed hooks are more economical. They are available in Models 202 from Eagle Claw or 3260B and 37353 from Mustad.

BLUEGILLS

The aberdeen style is also excellent for bluegills and other bream. Sizes 6 to 8 may be preferred. Mustad makes a model 37363 of extra fine wire that is fine for keeping crickets alive on the hook. If you use worms and like bait holder slices in the shank try the Eagle Claw Model 181 or the snelled version which is the 140.

SMALLMOUTH BASS

We like the size 4 Eagle Claw Model 139 (snelled) or 84 ringed for this fishing using nightcrawler, hellgrammite or mad tom baits. Some anglers like

No. 2's but the smaller hook nails more of those bait stealing rock bass and sunfish.

LARGEMOUTH BASS

Again it's the Eagle Claw 139 or 84 for bait fishing. The size should be from 1 to 2/0. Worm fishermen, using plastic worms, prefer the 3/0 size, with the Mustad 38928 and 33637 being favored. Many go for the Eagle Claw 295JB or the 295XBL style hooks. Although the vast majority of bass fishermen like size 3/0, we must confess to being partial to 1/0.

CATFISH

The double snelled Model 140 Eagle Claw in sizes 1 to 2/0 is fine for this fishing. The slices in the shank help keep the "stink" baits in place.

WALLEYE

Bass hooks will work for walleye, but long shank carlisle hooks, such as Mustad's 3191, are good. Size 1 or 1/0 is OK. Some experts prefer the aberdeen style hooks in sizes 4 through 1/0.

PERCH

A size 1 or 2 is fine when using minnows for bait. The Eagle Claw Model 32 snelled hook is good. For use with bloodworms, go to a smaller size, #4 with bait holder slices in the shank, No. 140 Eagle Claw or 92641 Mustad. With live grass shrimp, drop down to a No. 6 size hook.

PICKEREL

Hooks suitable for bass will take pickerel. Use double snells as protection against the teeth.

LANDLOCKED STRIPERS

Stout hooks ranging from 1/0 to 6/0 are good. We tend to go smaller, using the 1/0. The 92553 Mustad is good. Eagle Claw's Model 84 or 32 are also excellent.

As we move over to salt water we

are reminded that the "0" in hook sizes, such as 1/0, 2/0 etc., is said to stand for "Ocean" since these are the largest hooks and are commonly used in the ocean.

SPOT AND CROAKERS

Size 4 is about right. Some anglers like long shanked hooks because they often encounter toad fish and other "uglies." The odds-on favorite hook is the long-shanked, double-snelled Eagle Claw Model 231X. Short shanked hook fans opt for the Eagle Claw #32 or, if they want bait holder slices, the Model 140. The double snell feature is considered a must because salt water anglers often encounter bigger fish than they are fishing for, and provides a little insurance against sharp toothed fish, such as bluefish. Some anglers use nylon-coated wire snells, but these tend to hang low in the water and aren't moved about in the current as much as nylon snells. The theory is the more motion the bait has, the more attractive it is to fish.

FLOUNDER

The standard flounder hook is the No. 1 to 2/0 snelled carisle hook, which is not readily available in many tackle shops. The 213X Eagle Claw in these sizes has acquired quite a following among flounder fishermen. A newer hook, the so-called "English bend" produced in Model 37140 by Mustad, and Model 21 by Eagle Claw, is becoming more popular. Some anglers often purchase packages of hooks, labelled "flounder hooks," only to discover that they have bought tiny, long-shanked hooks ranging in size from 6 to 9. These are intended to catch bloodworm-eating winter flounders found in northern waters. These are Chestertown style hooks, not intended for our flounders, which Yankees call fluke.

TROUT

Called weakfish up north, these fish are known for the weak structure of the mouthparts. Broader, forged hooks are preferred. Sizes of hooks depend upon the size trout being taken. They can range from 1/0 to 7/0. The 231X is commonly used but it is not necessarily the best hook for the job. We prefer the long shank Pacific Bass Hook, Mustad Model 3498A, because it is heavier and less likely to tear through the mouth. Sizes 3/0 or 4/0 are about right.

BLUEFISH

Here's a fish that demands a wire

leader and a long-shanked hook. In snelled hooks, the Eagle Claw 420NW are excellent. These have nylon covered wire snells. Sizes ranging from 1/0 to 6/0 are fine, with a 4/0 being a good all-around choice. Mustad makes a super, long-shanked hook that is excellent for blues, particularly when chumming. The hook is Model 92618, size 8/0 is about right. Only a short wire leader is required with this one. Some boat skippers who lose lots of hooks use the least expensive carisle hooks they can buy.

STRIPED BASS

Stripers are so scarce in salt water these days that catching them is almost a lost art. The type of hook used depends largely upon the bait being employed. The Eagle Claw 140 series is excellent when using bloodworms as is the fine Mustad 92641. Sizes 1/0 or 2/0 are fine. For floating peeler crabs, the Eagle Claw Model 21 is gaining popularity. For surf fishing with clams or other baits, the Octopus style hook, made by Sealy of England, or similar models by Mustad (92553) or Eagle Claw (226), are excellent in sizes 2/0 to 6/0.

CHANNEL BASS

Octopus style hooks in 6/0 thru 9/0 are excellent.

COBIA

Octopus hooks in 9/0 are preferred.

TROLLING RIGS

For offshore trolling and rigging nylon or feather lures, good quality O'Shaughnessy hooks are almost standard. These are made by Mustad in Model No. 3407. Needle eye hooks, such as the Mustad 3412 are used for rigging natural baits. The heavy, hollow pointed Mustad Model 94150 in sizes 4/0 to 6/0 are fine for bait fishing to school tuna.

Hooks are available in many finishes. Bronze finishes are excellent except they do not stand up well in salt water. Tinned or cadmium-plated hooks have a measure of resistance to rust, and stainless steel is almost rust proof. This year, Eagle Claw has introduced the new "CAT" hook which is said to be very good in resisting the ravages of salt water.

Experienced anglers certainly have their own time-proven preferences which may or may not agree with mine. I believe, however, that this information will get you started. I deliberately favored hooks that are

easily recognized and available in most tackle shops. There are many other brands that will do the job.

Before closing, permit me to remind you that store-bought hooks, like store bought knives, are often dull. Whether they be loose, snelled or hooks on lures, some touching up with the hook hone will make more of your strikes turn into fish. □

Citation-Producing Waters in Virginia

by Jack Randolph

Have you ever wondered which of Virginia's lakes and streams yield the greatest number of citation catches? Here's a summary:

Back Bay remains the best spot for citation bass in Virginia. Although the number of citation (8 pounds and over) bass caught in Back Bay in 1981 declined from a record 240 in 1980 to 99 in 1981, the big brackish water fishing hole enjoyed its third best bass year ever, if lunker production is a criterion.

However, it appears that Back Bay now has a challenger for the position of the No. 1 bass water in Virginia. Lake Anna, with 58 citation bass in 1981 is coming on strong. Numerous citation bass have come out of Anna so far in 1982. A distant third for big bass honors is little Diascund Reservoir near Williamsburg, with 16 lunkers. Buggs Island produced 11 citation bass, Gaston, 9, and the Chickahominy River, three.

Smith Mountain Lake continues to dominate in the production of lunker striped bass, over fifteen pounds. A total of 457 citation stripers came out of Smith Mountain, just one fish less than the previous year. Lake Gaston was a distant second with 52 and tiny Lake Prince was third with 47. Buggs Island Lake reported 45 and Lake Anna is coming on with 42. One has to have a gut feeling that Buggs Island fishermen are not registering many of their big stripers for citations.

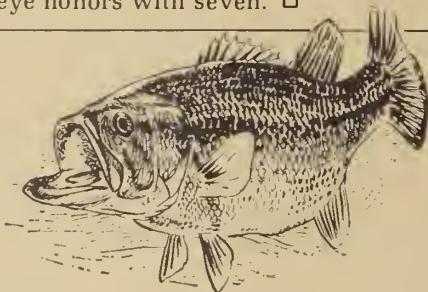
The James River retains its title as Virginia's top smallmouth stream. The James produced 93 smallmouths weigh-

ing four pounds or better in 1981, topping second place Claytor Lake which had 39. Claytor, incidentally, is rapidly improving as a smallmouth lake. Third place went to the New River where 37 citation bronzebacks were reported. A total of 15 citation smallmouths came out of South Holston Reservoir, 14 from Smith Mountain Lake and 14 from the Rappahannock River.

Buggs Island Lake is Virginia's crappie capital with 42 citation fish weighing 2½ pounds or better. Lake Chesdin was second with five.

Lake Prince produced enough big shellcrackers and bluegills to top the state in the bream category, with 80 weighing a pound or better. Lake Powell was second with 16.

The New River edged out Smith Mountain Lake, 25 to 22, in the musky category while the Smith River held its title for lunker brown trout with 44. The Bullpasture River produced the most big brook trout, 11. Claytor Lake, with 21 citation flathead catfish, was tops in the state for flatheads while the Nottoway River's 18 citation rock bass won the honors in the category. Claytor Lake was the best spot in Virginia for big white bass in 1981, surrendering 64 citations. Smith Mountain Lake had 30. The New River claimed walleye honors with seven. □



Keep Injured Fish

by Gerald Almy

Even if you like to release most of the fish you catch, don't throw back a bleeding or severely injured one. Such fish are not likely to survive. Chances are also good that they'll go back to the school they were with and scare the other fish with the distress signals they give out when injured. This will probably keep you from catching any more fish from that school. □

A Tale of Two Openings

by Bob York

To participate in the opening day of trout season is not to go on a meat-gathering expedition. Rather, it is to participate in a rite of spring, a celebration of the end of the winter hiatus.

In the spring of 1979, some friends and I visited, with rod and camera, the beautiful waters of Ramsey's Draft, a National Forest Service stream in Augusta County. In 1981, we did it again.

What a contrast! In '79 there were icicles suspended from bits of casual brush hanging near the water, and hot coffee was the refreshment. In '81, short-sleeved shirts were the uniform of the day and ice chests filled with cold drinks were everywhere.

If you haven't indulged in a trout season opening day, you wouldn't believe the numbers. It's a happening, and a happy happening, at that. Whole families turn out, many of them camping overnight. Generally speaking, politeness prevails. There are smiles instead of stealth, relaxation rather than rowdiness.

Just before driving over to Ramsey's Draft to fish, my friend John and I took a quick look at nearby Braley Pond. As I snapped some shots of the waiting fishermen, I couldn't help laughing: I compared it to the Oklahoma land rush, waiting for the starting gun to go off.

And yet it wasn't the same at all. No snorting horses, no frenetic jockeying for position, no snapping, gouging, cheating. Just plenty of relaxed people sitting at the water's edge, waiting for the minute hand to creep up to the noon mark.

Just for fun, late in the ('81) afternoon we all piled into one car and drove over the mountain to a private trout hatchery near Monterey. You've heard of "fish for fun"? Well, this is fish for fun and pay. You cast a baited hook into a shallow pool containing literally hundreds of brooks and rainbows, averaging about two pounds each. Catch all you want, but pay for what you catch. For the price you pay, the fish are thoroughly cleaned and packed in



Two proud fishermen

ice in a plastic bag. I caught four fish and they cost me eight dollars and change. Of course, this was not sport fishing. Unashamedly I tell you this was meat-gathering. At home, the trout were frozen completely immersed in water. If you haven't tried this, you have a treat in store. When thawed for cooking, the fish really does taste fresh; this works equally well for small game.

During both visits to Ramsey's Draft, we each caught a few of the smallish rainbows. Most ran seven to nine inches in length. I understand that fish under seven inches are sexually immature and so have not begun to contribute to their own propagation. Still, I wondered about the size. I live right on a stocked stream in Madison County, the Robinson, and the trout there are considerably larger. Then I decided it must be because of the actual nature of Ramsey's Draft, a genuine mountain stream, shallow and rocky, with only an occasional deeper pool.

So sally forth for some salmonids. You'll probably catch a few, and whether it's hot or cold, you're a cinch to meet some kindred spirits. □

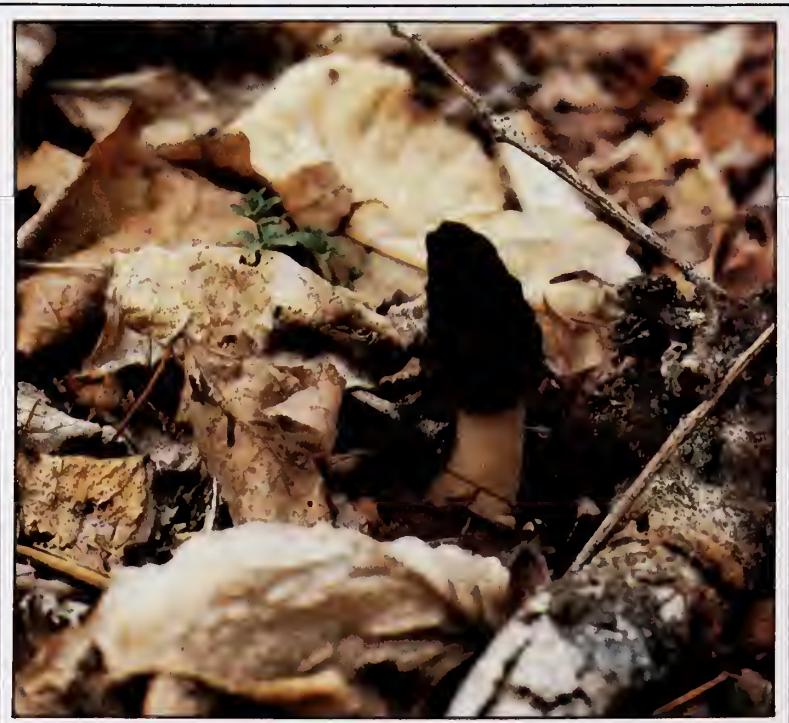


Trout, Trillium & Morels

Spring in the Blue Ridge is
trout and more.



After the thrill of catching a wild trout (above) and scouting morels (right), you can enjoy a gourmet feast.



The scent of apple blossoms wafted enticingly on the soft, spring breeze as Darrell Morris and I briskly hiked through the Nelson County orchard. The perfumed air added to our anticipation of a morning's trout fishing, to be followed by morel mushroom hunting in the afternoon. Our journey took us from the orchard into a mixed hardwood forest, where we followed a path to a bold stream.

Mid-April in the mountains of Virginia! Bonus after bonus pops up as you explore the woods. Bloodroot, rue anemone, toothwort and wild geranium bordered the swift stream, and two enticing pools beckoned.

Darrell eased up to the first pool and skillfully cast his fly, a brown bivisible he says resembles "just a bug." The "bug" landed lightly in mid-pool, and Darrell picked up the slack line. Smack! A hungry native eastern brook trout hit the fly hard. No more than five inches long, this little tiger fought the light fly rod with vigor beyond his size. Overcome in a few moments despite his heroic resistance, the fierce little fellow was released gently and quickly to provide another day's sport.

Darrell motioned me to try the next pool. It was like a TV rerun, two pools—two trout. Pretty good start for a native trout stream in the Blue Ridge Mountains, right? You bet, considering that state fisheries biologist Larry Mohn says some Virginia streams lost up to 80 percent of their native trout due to ice and/or drought during 1980-81. But now, let's go upstream and see if Darrell's right about the deeper holes there containing bigger fish.

Both of us are dedicated wildflower enthusiasts, so our upstream trek was slowed by frequent stops to admire and photograph wild bleeding heart or the largest milk-white bloodroot blossoms I've ever seen.

As we threaded our way up the every-narrowing gorge where the stream flowed strongly between two massive, rugged mountains, the stream's depth and swiftness increased.

Here Darrell's advice to use the brown bivisible, with its white hackle, proved invaluable. "The idea behind the bivisible (invented by master fly fisherman Edward Hewitt) was to produce a fly that could easily be seen by both the trout and the fisherman. . ." In the tumbling, swirling water, it stood out smartly, allowing us to keep it in view and react quickly when a trout struck.

And strike they did! We soon landed on our barbless hooks five or six more natives in the six-to-eight-inch range. Nothing spectacular, but good sport on 7½-foot fly rods with weight six line and number ten-size flies.

As we scrambled over slippery, moss-covered, instream rocks and numerous car-sized boulders, we began to notice an abundance of one of my favorite wildflowers, trillium. The variety of the three-parted wildflower which grows in this moist, rich, shady gorge is large-flowered trillium (*T. Grandiflorum*). Pure white when newly opened, the trillium blossom turns pinkish with age. It is a beauty.

A frequent visitor to this little-known stream, Darrell knows it well enough to direct his companion to certain parts of certain pools. "Cast into the center of his one," he

recommended, "just where the frothy water smooths out." I did, and we both whooped when a good-sized trout rose to the fly but missed it.

"Put it back in the same spot," Darrell suggested. "I don't think he felt the hook." I did, and he felt the hook this time. And I felt him. We dueled all over his pool, giving and taking, the fish surging to the depths yet again when I thought him finally spent. Patiently, heart thumping, I played this battler to shallow water and thankfully landed him.

I felt as if I had landed part of a rainbow. Resplendent in red, blue, yellow, orange and other colors difficult to describe accurately, the trout measured nine-and-a-half inches.

Though we seldom kill wild trout, this one Darrell quickly dispatched, to accompany our planned trout-and-mushroom supper. This stream is blessed with an abundance of flow, except during unusually extended periods of low rainfall, and it contains a thriving trout population. Our nine-plus incher already had done more than his share to insure a sustaining population, and the remaining fish world benefit from his absence. Generally, however, we follow a strict "no-kill" policy to insure that we don't abuse the fragile cold water fishery.

Placing the fish on the forest floor among the luxuriant growth of trillium, I marveled at the combination of as I photographed the scene.

Before our time ran out, Darrell landed a couple more beauties and I added one. We tore ourselves away from the cascading chutes and deep, rock-encased glides and hiked from our fairyland back to the real world.

We drove to my home near Afton, collected my wife, Mary Frances, and continued to Darrell's parents' home at Rockfish. There we were introduced to yet another fascinating world: hunting "edible fungi," better known as mushrooms, in this case the morel or *morchella*, "...one of the very choicest. . .best cooked stuffed and baked, or sauteed and served on toast, with a sauce made of its own rich juice," according to Euell Gibbons in *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*.

Gibbons points out, too, that "...a fool can find a way to kill himself anywhere, but that is no reason why sensible, prudent people shouldn't enjoy delicious and wholesome wild mushrooms. Like other wild plants, the fungi require some study before one starts using them for food."

Darrell and his parents, Evelyn and Darrell, Sr., are experts not only at identifying the morel but at spying them in their near-perfect camouflage on the forest floor. With their dark, labyrinthine heads and nearly neutral stems, morels are truly tough to spot when scattered in the forest. Finding them with consistency takes more than a little practice.

Back at our house, we fried our trout in a delightful Carolina-originated batter mix provided from the Morris's private stock, and carefully sauteed our harvest of morels. With a fresh salad and a crackling cold bottle of white wine, we enjoyed beyond description a dinner provided by the bounty of Nature.

Trout, trillium, morels, plus the best companionship—truly a day to remember. □

Versatility Fills Your Stringer

The successful angler is the one who's willing to change his tactics.

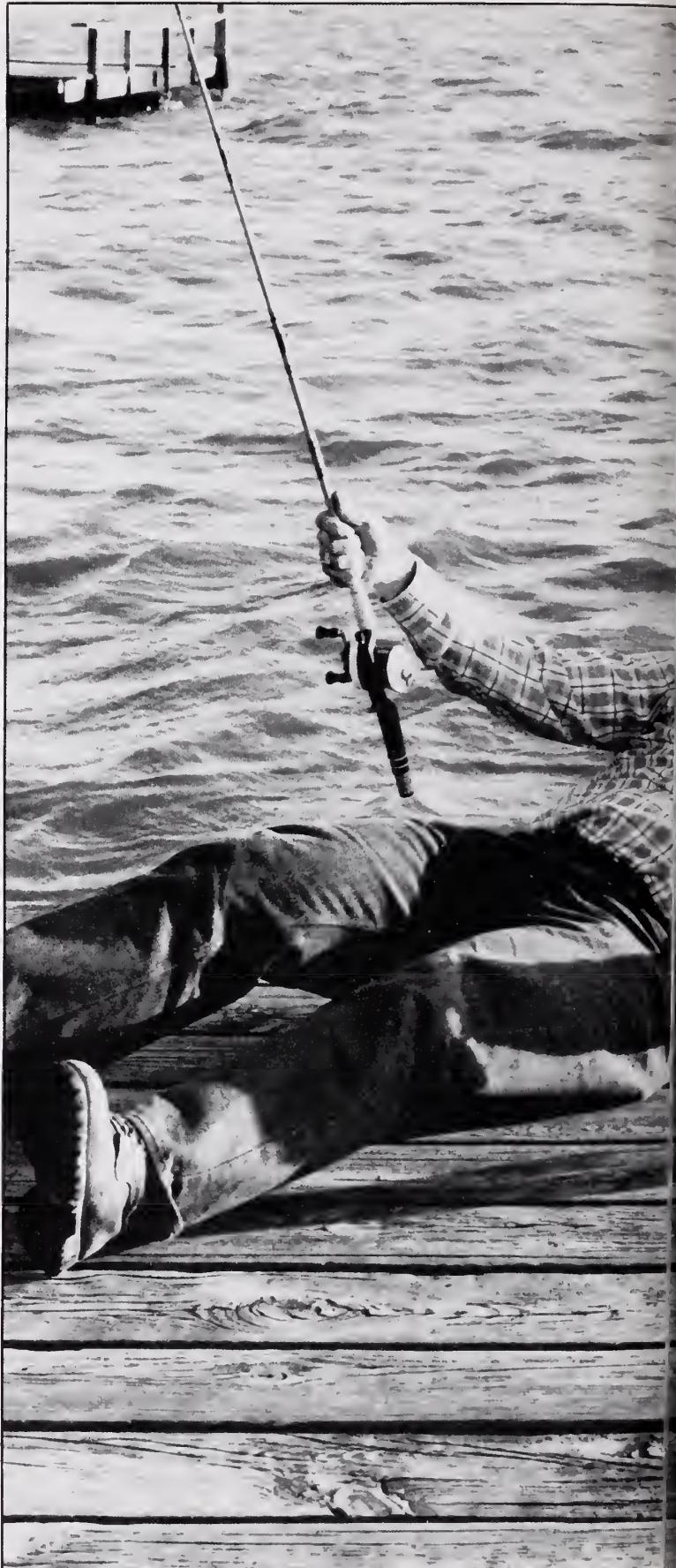
by Richard Martin

I'm a bass fisherman, and like any other angler, I spend plenty of hours seeking both largemouth and smallmouth. I like their hard attacks, and their bulldog scrapping. I like matching wits with them too, and trying to decide just where they'll be and what they'll be hitting at a given time under different weather conditions.

But no matter how good a man is at bass hunting, there'll be days when he just doesn't win, and if you stick to bassing through thick and thin, there'll be plenty of days when you don't win. As for me, I'm no purist. If bass will hit, that's great; but if they won't, I'll try something else, and that's where a lot of fishermen of any caliber can go wrong. They go out strictly for one fish, whether it be bass, muskie, walleye, trout or whatever, and that's not the answer. The guy who has the truly memorable days is the one who just likes to wet a line. He'll go prepared to catch fish, whatever the species. In short, he's versatile, and that's the secret to consistently full stringers.

I made a trip to a good-sized private lake last spring, for example. I've fished this spot often and it's a fine bass lake, but that morning it just wasn't perking. A storm had gone through the day before, washing the air and landscape shining bright, but turning the lake a little murky and bouncing barometers all over the dial. I tried every trick in my noggin, but by 9 a.m. I'd taken only two quickly-released youngsters and a single bull crappie.

I was working crankbaits down a long stretch of shoreline by that time, heading for a thin, stump-ridden backwater in the lake's east end and I was ready to quit—bass fishing at least. Then I saw swirls far back along a cluster of stumps in that backwater. Carp! And big ones. Just for luck I'd brought along a dozen nightcrawlers that morning,





and it didn't take long to paddle into the bay, nose my canoe's back end up on shore, and tie up a two hook bottom rig.

For two or three minutes I relaxed, watching a pair of courting wood ducks nuzzling along shore, then the rod tip went down and I tied into an eight-pounder. You can say what you like about carp, but no one argues that they're

(Left) Even the lowly carp can provide action when nothing else is biting; (above) the tasty channel cat will pounce on night crawlers drifted through deep holes; (top) jigs are one of the most lethal lures made for largemouth and other species.

fighters, and I eventually had to push off and follow that critter a ways to gain the upper hand. He came aboard in a rush of tail-driven water, a golden, shiny, bugle-mouthed scrapper. I caught seven more that morning, along with a cluster of fat bullheads, kept all the bullheads to fry with my single crappie, and sorted out several smoking-sized carp that eventually became some delectable eating. Just having nightcrawlers along and being willing to use them turned a near fishless trip into a red-letter morning.

Being versatile pays off not only when times are tough. I was working another lake one fine Saturday morning two years ago, and the bass were biting mighty well. They were coming in to spawn, and I picked up fish after fish in sizes of up to four pounds on surface poppers and shallow running spinners. When the action died off, I had three

largemouth on the stringer, selected from well over a dozen caught and I was still pumping adrenalin, just not ready to quit. Ever had that feeling? When you should be satisfied with the morning's catch, but aren't? I dug around in my tackle box and came up with a miniature doll fly. Total length of this offering was less than an inch and its grub body was lightly surrounded with breathing maribou. Crappie love it, and when it comes to eating, I love crappie. I headed for a cluster of stumps that poke up out of eight feet of water, spent an hour dabbling that offering around the limbs and roots, and picked up over 30 fat crappie. Good fun, good fishing, and good eating. But if I'd simply packed up my gear and left after bassing died off, I'd never have had that heavy mixed stringer.

Then we headed for home and made a quick stop at a deep hole where my experience told me that channel cats holed up for the day. We bagged at least a dozen of the whiskered scrappers by drifting nightcrawlers before deciding to call it quits. Our final tally was respectable even though we released all our bass. We had a super trip, enjoyed a beautiful morning on the water, filled our cooler, and went home happy.

If you're going to be versatile, you'll need some knowledge of the various species waiting to be caught. Equally important is a "tacklebox within a tacklebox." If you're planning to hunt for muskies, fill that box with muskie gear, if you're going after bass, load it with plastic worms, crankbaits, spinners, and other necessities. Then take a

**"If you carry the basics and switch,
rather than being stubborn when
action is sparse, you'll eat a lot of
fish and have a lot of fun;
versatility is the answer."**

Are you starting to get a picture here? I'm as thrilled as the next guy to listen to or watch a purist pursuing his chosen species. I like to see a good fly fisherman present a perfect fly or watch a muskie hunter skip his huge offering beneath an overhanging limb along shore. But I like to catch fish too, and the man, woman, or child who consistently catches fish is the one who's versatile.

You've got to be willing to change tactics when one method doesn't work. You've got to be able to switch species when one isn't biting. And you've got to have enough gear in that tackle box (it needn't be much) to be able to take advantage of any situation that comes along, whether it be a sudden minnow-ridden boil of surface feeding white bass or a shallow water migration of oversized bluegills. Versatility, that's the answer.

Being willing to take advantage of any situation will pay off in lakes and streams throughout Virginia, but it's on the large waters that you can really score. I had a call from a fishing partner last spring who had the itch, and we decided to try for a mess of walleye. It was grey dawn when four of us left the dock, and a prettier morning you'll never find. The air was cool with a promise of warm temperatures to come, birds were singing, and the lake's blue water had a pungent scent of growing things from the land just behind. It was a fishing morning.

We motored out to a couple of reefs in no particular hurry, just enjoying wind and water, and started working Lindy rigs right along bottom. In far too little time we'd gathered a respectable catch of walleye. "What do we do now?" one partner asked as he removed his well-chewed worm. "I hate to quit fishing at 8:30 in the morning."

"Let's see if we can pick up a few largemouths," I suggested. "They should be hitting right along shore wherever we can find good cover close to deep water." We tied on black maribou jigs with pork eels and drifted along shore for just over an hour. That brought us eight fine largemouths, including a four-pounder.

very small plastic snap-top container or similar gear holder and add:

1. a dozen or so hooks in various sizes
2. several jigs in both black and white, ranging from 1/16 ounce up to 1/4 ounce
3. a couple of small spinners
4. some sinkers and swivels
5. two or three small, dark-colored flies
6. a quarter-sized bobber to two

A box this size will be darn near hidden in your other gear, but that three or four ounces of tackle, coupled with a dozen nightcrawlers, will make you versatile enough to catch almost anything that swims in Virginia's lakes and streams. With the hooks and sinkers, used as either two hook bottom lines or Lindy rigs, you can catch anything from carp and bullheads to channel cats and perch.

The jigs are probably the most lethal lure made, good for crappie, bass, walleye, perch, and a long list of other species. Wondering about the flies and bobbers? I use these mostly for quick stops along a bluegill bed. The bobber gives weight enough for casting and I can flip a fly and float combination into beds full of dark black spawning bulls and pick up as many bluegill as I care to clean. They'll also account for a surprising number of small to medium sized bass and an occasional crappie.

You'll need just one more thing to come home with a heavy stringer almost every time, and that's a willingness to switch. Call it attitude. Some bassers, muskie seekers, and walleye addicts just won't quit, no matter what the conditions. But like a pro football coach, I like to win. If my 25 years of experience tell me that bass aren't going to hit, I'll try for bluegill, crappie, or carp. If muskies won't strike, I'll switch to bass, or whatever. If you carry the basics and switch, rather than being stubborn when action is sparse, you'll eat a lot of fish, have a lot of fun, and build memories great for cozy nights beside a roaring fire. Versatility—that's the answer. □

The James: the fabled James, longest U.S. river wholly contained within a single state, heralded far and wide as a fine smallmouth bass stream, a float fisherman's delight, paradise for canoeists and heaven for history buffs.

The river, 340 miles long, has been part of our lives from early childhood. We crossed it many times, as have most Virginians, on trips from Roanoke north, south from Charlottesville or in the Richmond area.

I fished from its bank once as a 10-year-old, courtesy of a kind neighbor, and waded its rock-strewn bed on a summer Sunday three years ago.

But neither my wife, Mary Frances, nor I had had an opportunity to do the one thing we thought would put us on really intimate terms with the James—canoe a part of it, novices though we were.

We were provided an excellent chance to remedy this situation when Christie Schmick invited us to join her and husband Jeff at Hatton Ferry, approximately five miles by the road upstream from Scottsville. Christie and Jeff own and operate James River Runners, Inc., a Canoe Livery. The business operates from a building which has seen 100 years of life on the James, as a general store and post office, and has fared better than most structures hit by the rising waters of the river because its owners opened the front and back doors to allow the floodwaters to rush through unimpeded.

When we took our trip in 1980, the 15-canoe livery provided a variety of trips from a one-to-three hour float from Warren Ferry to Hatton Ferry, to a 32-mile overnighter from Midway Mills to Bremo Bluff. Call James River Runners at the number listed at the end of this article to get the most current information on trips and prices.

Considering our limited time and our newness to the canoeing art, we chose to travel the three miles "between the ferries."

Although Jeff and his longtime friend, Reggie Claar, were to accompany us, we listened intently as Christie explained the river's character in detail to a party of four who had opted for the nine-mile trip from Howardsville to Hatton. Aided by a topographic map tacked on a back wall of the rustic old store, Christie stressed safety, provided reassurance, proclaimed the "pack out your trash" rule and gave a quick lesson in what to expect when it really counted: on your own on the water.

After "fitting" everyone to paddles of proper length and choosing the necessary personal flotation devices, we loaded into the Schmick's pick-up and, our canoes stacked like giant, colorful loaves of bread in the tow-trailer, headed upstream.

Our circuitous upstream shuttle along narrow country roads bordered by manicured pastures and lush forests provided a fitting appetizer to our float trip—this is a sterling part of Virginia.

Arriving at Warren Ferry, Jeff and Reggie unloaded the canoes in a flash and in a few minutes we were on the river.

We paddled to the other side as instructed by Jeff, since low water prevented downstream progress along the north side. Holding in deeper but fairly slow water, we received guidance on basic paddling and river navigation and then were really on our way.

Mary Frances and I found that our somewhat erratic course slowed progress, but we were in no hurry and needed the opportunity to practice our paddling technique,

The J A M E S



Between the Ferries

The James River from Howardsville to Hatton can be a fishing trip, a history lesson, or just a stretch for the beginning canoeist.

by Bob Belton

as we had never canoed together on anything but a farm pond or Sherando Lake. River canoeing is altogether different.

Much to my wife's amazement, I had left my fishing rod at home, intent on canoeing and acquiring a sense of the river. A sense of serenity and relaxation, of solitude and the ever-present if muted power of the river were immediately discernible. To a fisherman like myself, though, the sight of smallmouth bass or feisty bluegill snaring midday morsels under the overhanging shoreline vegetation held fascinating temptation.

Then, Jeff yelled: "Did you see that? Did you see that bass? He was huge!" He had spotted a whopper, one he judged to be in the 20-inch category. I'll take his word for it, too. Jeff knows canoeing, and the river, and fishing for smallmouth.

After our encounter with Old Mister Bronzeback, I asked Jeff where he thought the most scenic area of our float would be. "About 200 yards ahead."

We paddled on at a leisurely pace, soaking in the peacefulness, and approached a truncated island, its worn upstream surface a craggy, irregular cliff which gave way downstream to sloping, tree-covered soil.

Taking my camera from within its double waterproof protection (thoughtfully provided by Christie), I took several shots of this impressive cliff, which rose more-or-less straight up for about 40 feet. "Want to climb up from the other side?" Jeff asked. "It's not difficult." We did and it wasn't.

Fifteen minutes on the river and a sight like this! You can see a good distance up the James from atop this small island, just upstream from a larger but less impressive

piece of real estate identified on the topographic map as Rock Island. You can spot large gar, a toothy fish with a long snout, as we did, and you can appreciate the scenes that mute hunk of hardness has witnessed, from the crazy, raging torrents of Hurricane Camille in '69 back to the drought of 1806, when it's said that James Carr with one hand stopped the flow of the Rivanna, a major tributary of the James. And that was only yesterday to this anonymous island.

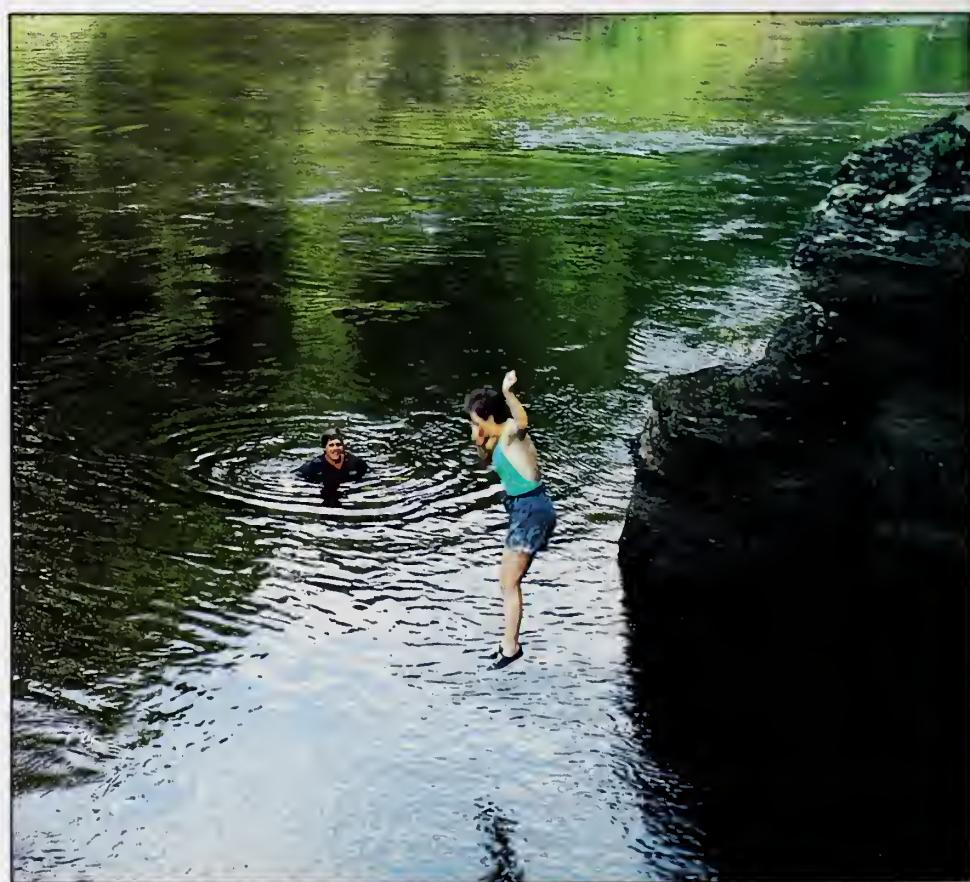
First Jeff, then Mary Frances, caught the irresistible urge to jump into the cool water on this hot day from one of the island's low, natural diving platforms. They loved it, but Jeff was careful to point out that jumping from very high was foolish, even with the river much deeper than during its typical late summer reduced flow. "Too many submerged rocks," he said.

While Mary Frances and Jeff took their swim and Reggie relaxed in one of the canoes, I wondered how this island happened to be there in the James, so tall and strong but more reminiscent of Maine coastline than a central Virginia river.

Our friend Mo Stevens, very knowledgeable in such matters, explained that the island is a "resistant hard spot, the stubborn remnant of a ridge extending northeast from the Buckingham County (south) side of the river."

"The river preceded the present landform," Mo explained. Constantly seeking a path for itself, it carried gravel and sand to tirelessly scour its channel through the way of least resistance, even to the extent of forming a horseshoe bend like the one which originates near Hatton Ferry. From the ferry it carries the river to its northernmost extremity at Scottsville and culminates between that

"Jeff had spotted a whopper of a smallmouth...then, Jeff and Mary Frances caught the urge to jump into the cool water."



river town and the Hardware's confluence with the James. From this point, the James finally escapes toward the sea without more radical turns.

Over the ages, the river has altered its course here and there, and Mo pointed out that "you can see large rocks on some of the bluffs where the channel used to be. The river hasn't gone far, though—it gets entrenched and doesn't move much."

After photographing some perfect raccoon tracks in a muddy backwater, we resumed our trip. We soon paddled by a fly fisherman who had waded into the river. He looked happy there, as if he belonged in the river for that time, casting for a scrappy bluegill.

We bounced through riffles, enough of a test for our fledgling talent, and maneuvered around rocks, acquiring a bit more confidence and skill. And we enjoyed ourselves.

Soon we came to another fisherman. He was happy, too, a nice collection of "eating size" smallmouth gracing his stringer. "Caught 'em on grasshoppers," he informed us. Something for everybody.

Ahead we heard the unmistakable sound of falling water, louder than we'd experienced before. Pulling up beside Jeff and Reggie, we were told to follow them and "stay to the left. There's Hatton Ferry, just below." And yes, when the river's up, this whitewater section can be quite a challenge. "Up to Class III depending on which place you try to get through."

We dutifully followed the leader, Mary Frances in the bow commanding to her sternman "to the left, to the left." Left we went (somehow) and then a quick, fun ride and there was the ferry.

We paddled to the shore and had no sooner gotten out than Jeff introduced us to Ned Hocker, the ferry operator. Two years past his retirement intention, Ned stays on for lack of a replacement and mans a tie to the past on this last pole-operated ferry in Virginia.

He remembers many busy times, when horse-drawn wagons crossed on his ferry, carrying wood or flour or hay.

Time and bridges and people have wrought change, but Ned seems as timeless and serene as the river. "People don't want the ferry to stop operating," he says, "but they don't seem to know what to do with it either."

We reluctantly left Ned Hocker's pleasant company, and Jeff drove us the short way up the river bank, across the railroad tracks to James River Runner's old store headquarters.

We sat on the porch, Mary Frances and I happily in a swing. We downed cold drinks, relived our trip, were introduced to Jeff's pet black snake and didn't want to leave. The whisper of the river in the background; the loud-but-not-too-loud roar of a passing Chessie System train; the sense of history and the pleasantness of our surroundings, old wood, old paint, easy conversation, the swing, conspired to keep us there.

We wanted to see and learn more, but we couldn't do everything in one visit. But in addition to the fun of the river and meeting Ned Hocker, we had accomplished our main objective: capturing the "feel" of the place. And it had captured us.

(To contact James River Runners, write them at Rt. 1, Box 106, Scottsville, Va. 24590 or call (804) 286-2338 weekends or (804) 973-8003 weekdays.) □

David Ryan





A Passing Craft

A trout enthusiast is sustaining a seldom-practiced craft: building bamboo fly rods.

by Bob Belton

Hank Woolman is a lucky man. He does for a living something he loves, and he creates objects of great beauty, use and value at the same time. Hank creates custom-built fly rods, mostly of bamboo. And these fly rods are works of art.

On a fishing expedition to the Rapidan River with Tom Pero, editor of Trout magazine, Hank used a hand-made rod belonging to Pero. He liked it. A lot. "I decided if someone else could build a rod like that by hand, so could I."

Some sage has decreed, he advises, that a person is not a builder of fly rods until a hundred have been completed, "and I've made only ten so far." Take a look at number ten and judge for yourself if Hank has "arrived."

A tall, sturdy, gregarious man of 40, with a mildly booming voice, Hank is proprietor of The Outdoorsman in Middleburg. He supplies a variety of outdoor clothing and equipment, plus fishing gear. In the process he's able to discuss, advise and learn about the ways and places his merchandise is used. And he'll even guide you to a likely-looking Blue Ridge stream to fish for native or stocked trout.

Hank is enthusiastic about everything he does, but trout fishing with a bamboo fly rod he built himself and a seductive fly (you guessed it—he ties them, too) carries him to pinnacles of exuberance.

A long time member of Trout Unlimited, a national organization dedicated to protection of the nation's cold water (trout) habitat, Hank often speaks before one of Virginia's ten Trout Unlimited chapters or other groups which share his interest in the outdoors in general and fishing in particular, which has been a major pastime of his since 1940. He also writes about such matters as restocking trout in a marginal stream or what Trout Unlimited is all about.

But, for now, his favorite topic is handcrafting bamboo rods on the workbench in his Middleburg shop, under the watchful eye of his Brittany spaniel, Camembert.

"Hey, there's some of that bamboo stuff growing in a corner of the neighbor's yard," you say. Same species, wrong location. The only bamboo acceptable for rod-making grows about 50 miles northwest of Canton, in China. Soil, climate, whatever, cause the Chinese connection to offer the best bamboo—it just makes stronger rods.

Once Hank has the raw product in hand, he inspects each "culm," a 12-foot section of bamboo, which is cut in two—one section each for the tip and butt end of the fly rod. He's looking for leaf nodes, water marks (possible weak spots) and natural splits. From the now six-foot-long culm, he slices the six strips ("splits") needed for either a tip or butt section.

Each of the six splits must then be planed and filed into an equilateral triangle and tapered to specifications as small as .024 inch at the tip. How can this be done by hand?



(Left) Hank splits a six-foot section of bamboo into six strips needed to make the rod. (above) he displays the finished product.

Not easily, or quickly. Hank uses two steel tapering guides. Sixty-five inches long, these heavy guides are fitted with screws every five inches to allow the control necessary when working to very exact specifications.

Using the tapering guides, Hank planes each strip close to the final taper, assembles the six strips and wraps them with heat-resistant thread. The sections then are heated at 222-225° F for 40-50 hours to strengthen them.

Next, the strips are glued, dimensions are checked with a micrometer and then reduced to the desired taper.

Straightening that was not accomplished when the rod was removed from Hank's homemade kiln is done at this time, using an alcohol lamp to heat the bamboo until it is pliable. If there is any twist remaining, it is removed, too.

Ferrules are attached to allow joining of the two sec-

tions, the handle is assembled, line guides are securely wrapped in place and lettering denoting rod length and correct line weight is carefully applied. Hank's signature is added, and the name of the owner, if desired.

The final step consists of three or four dippings in varnish.

Now, 25 to 50 hours of effort, excluding drying time, have yielded a handmade bamboo fly rod, with an oiled teak wood handle if you prefer. Materials costs around \$30. A "Hank Woolman Special" can be yours for \$300 and up.

Sounds pretty simple, doesn't it? And I don't believe I left anything out in the telling. Well, the sweat maybe, and the exactitude, and the "feel" for the craft did get short shrift as I tried to give you the idea without

Hank says this "feel" comprises about 30 percent of the overall effort, but "it's developed through experimenting with different tapers." He must be able to translate the degree of taper of the rod, from butt to tip, into the performance this taper will yield under the ultimate pressure: an angry wild brook trout rolling in the frothy current of a swift mountain stream.

To do less would demean Hank's craft and, thus, himself. "Some others use a more scientific approach," Hank points out. "They have everything worked out arithmetically. But I like my trial and error method better. Oh, I'm careful in my measurements, and I use the micrometer often but, even if all the arithmetic works out and the rod still doesn't feel right, then it's not right."

"Hank starts with a 12-foot chunk of bamboo good for not much, and the end result is an exquisite, delicately balanced, meticulously finished wand."

making this a primer on "how to build a bamboo fly rod in one easy lesson."

Let's deal with "sweat" and "exactitude," since often they go together, that is, the better you try to make something, the harder it is. And making a good bamboo fly rod is hard work, requiring study, concentration, and a lot of finagling. Even a determined guy like Hank Woolman doesn't just buy some bamboo and start a fly rod assembly line overnight. Hank used Everett Garrison's book, *A Master's Guide To Building A Bamboo Fly Rod*, Martha's Glen Publishing Company, Katonak, N.Y. 10536, as a major reference source, and developed his own methodology from there. Hank calls this his "empirical approach" to rod building.

Each of Hank's fly rods is a struggle. After all, he started with a 12-foot chunk of bamboo, good for not much, and the end result is an exquisite, delicately balanced, meticulously finished wand sure to warm the cockles of even the more practical-minded "meat" fisherman.

When Hank is cutting and splitting the culm and planing splits of the sharp, once-uneven bamboo, he sweats. And then he sweats some more over "exactitude," the quality differential that will determine if his 40-odd hours of effort have produced a rod with the right action or one "too heavy in the butt" or "too weak in the tip section."

To consistently avoid the pitfalls that would disgust most folks and discourage them to the point of giving up, a rod maker must have a "feel," an instinct for the craft.

Maybe building a fine bamboo fly rod isn't so simple after all, especially since a person wants to be proud to present a new bamboo rod to its eager owner and experience satisfaction upon receiving payment: value for value. Rod-building is not a task to be taken lightly, by anyone, since the craft requires an abundance of skill, knowledge, patience, determination, a good eye, an abundance of manual dexterity, and a steady hand.

Hank Woolman has a steady hand. But Hank lost the fingers and thumb of his right hand in an accident involving a corn-picking machine over ten years ago. And still this remarkable man produces fly rods of bamboo, to specifications dealing in thousandths of an inch.

"No big deal," he'd say without false modesty.

Maybe so, but I admire such grit, and I admire beauty. And I would be proud to fish with one of Hank's hand-crafted fly rods, to feel the delicate balance between the rod's power and the strength of a surging trout. Such a combination of ingredients holds wonders for me, and it does for Hank, too. Like the man said, "...if somebody else could build a rod like that by hand, so could I."

Hank's strength lies not in his ability to make such a statement but in his translating the words into action. The names of revered masters of the craft are legendary, such as H.L. Leonard, "Pinkie" Gillum, Fred Thomas, Hiram Hawes, Everett Garrison, and Jim Payne. Who knows? Maybe time, experience and good fortune will add the name "Hank Woolman" to that illustrious list. □

“Throw a Net”

The annual migration of shad and herring up our coastal rivers celebrates the arrival of spring. Drifting a net is a productive way to get a plentiful supply.

by Randall Shank

The wind whistled through the air as it turned a normally placid river into a choppy torrent. Clouds raced overhead and the trees blew furiously as the storm followed the river's easterly course. We sat in the truck and waited for a calm wind and a slack tide to coincide.

Abruptly, the wind stopped and the trees were still. The four-foot waves melted into the brackish water and the raging river now looked like a mirrored pond. Hurriedly we jumped from the truck, unloaded the net and other gear, and put it all into the boat.

The day before, I had been standing on the banks of the Mattaponi River with fishing rod in hand, having little luck with the fish but enjoying the revelry of spring. A female wood duck made countless trips back and forth to a dead sycamore tree and popped into a cavity in the tree as she prepared her nest for the ducklings to come. I saw a beaver glide slowly upstream on the opposite side of the river, probing the shore for a potential home site. The redbuds had already bloomed and the leaves on the trees had that light, fresh, green color that you only see in the spring. Like the rhythms of the seasons and like the pulses of the tidal river with its dependable high and low, the fish of the sea answer a call in the spring to return to freshwater and complete the cycle of their existence. With the blossoms of the mayapple, the shad and herring return to inland rivers to spawn.

When the shad and herring make their annual run up the Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers, word spreads fast among the fishermen in the area. Most of the fishermen on

these rivers go after shad with rod and reel, but many fish with a drift net. As a lifelong angler, I had always looked askance at the net fisherman. It had always seemed to me that there was no real challenge or skill involved in fishing with a net. And harvesting such a large number of fish from a net went against my conservationist grain. But once Gene Clements convinced me to try “throwing a net,” my education began.

As we headed upstream in the john boat pushed by a 7½ horsepower motor, I began to learn that many skills are needed to be a successful net fisherman. There is a definite technique to dropping and distributing the floating net into the river.

Conditions must be right to effectively use a drift net. There should be little or no wind because waves can foul the net. A slack tide enables the fisherman to get a more even distribution of the net across the river. With the still tide, the net is held in place and floats suspended in the water by a series of corks attached to the top of the net. Net fishing is controlled by law and the Game Commission requires an annual gill net license of the owner.

We used two types of nets, a shad net and a herring net. They are similar, but each net better fits the size of the fish being sought; the shad net has a larger diameter mesh than the herring net. With the nets neatly packaged in a plastic clothes basket, Gene was able to easily release them into the water. I was in the rear guiding the boat. (The whole job can be performed more easily with two people, but a skilled and experienced drift net fisherman can do it all by himself.)

Herring and shad are the major species caught during the spring spawning run.

Reaching our destination upstream, we dropped one end of the net about 30 yards from the bank. I learned that if the net is dropped too close to shore, it may become entangled in the underbrush that lies in shallow water. Gene also told me that the stretch of water should be straight, because if the net is allowed to drift on a curve, the risk of entanglement increases. With the tide slack, I paddled diagonally across the river as Gene released the shad net into the water. His aim was to create a bow in the net with each end pointing downstream, and the middle of the net at the farthest point of the net pointing upstream. As the fish surged upstream, they would move into the U-shaped net.

We cranked the motor back up and rode behind the net to inspect it for distribution and tangles. Staying behind the net was crucial, because riding in front of it (the downstream side) would have spooked the fish headed upstream into the net. After seeing that the shad net was properly in place, we went another 400 yards upstream and threw the herring net just as we had done the shad net. By the time we were finished, the tide had changed and both nets were drifting downstream.

The American shad (*Alosa sapidissima*) is the largest member of the herring family. The average shad weighs four pounds, although some grow to 10 or 12 pounds. The female is heavier than the male and will deposit from 30,000 to 150,000 eggs when spawning. The eggs hatch in about eight days, and by fall, they have grown to three inches.

The hickory shad (*Alosa mediocris*) is smaller than the American shad, averaging about two pounds. It is a member of the herring family and ranges from Maine to Florida.

Also caught in drift nets are Atlantic herring (*Clupea harengus harengus*) which is smaller than its shad cousins. Although stronger tasting than the shad, it is another important food fish.

The roe of shad and herring have been considered a delicacy, and these fish have been an important food source since the settlement of Jamestown and before. The Pamunkey and Mattaponi Indians harvest and feast on these fish every spring as part of a great tradition. The traditional—and political—shad plankings and fish fries bring thousands of people from throughout the state to the Tidewater to enjoy the delectable flesh and roe of the shad.

As soon as we had set the herring net, we headed downstream to the shad net which was disappearing from sight around a bend in the river. When we reached the net, I shut the engine off and we began pulling in the net. We carefully laid it in the basket to avoid tangles. We were hoping for a large catch of shad, but caught only two nice females that weighed about five pounds a piece.

Somewhat disappointed, we headed back upstream to retrieve the herring net. As soon as we got to the net, Gene exclaimed, "Oh my goodness!" As he pulled the net in, each foot of net held two or three herring. In all, there were about a hundred herring and two additional big roe. The net was a tangled mess. We had been in the water less than



an hour and were loaded with fish. And the work had only begun.

Perhaps the biggest job associated with fishing with a drift net is that of "picking" the net when the fishing is done. There is an art to untangling a spent net. The skill is only developed through seasons of practice. We were fortunate in that we got help in picking the herring net, and were able to untangle it in about an hour. Since the shad net only had a couple of fish in it, the picking was easy.

The second hardest job is cleaning so many fish. By gathering together families and friends who wish to share the catch, you can clean the fish and remove the roe in a relatively short period of time. With enough people, cleaning the fish is a social event in itself and can be a most enjoyable affair. In this way too, none of the fish are wasted since they are distributed among the participants.

The shad are saved and either baked or fried. The roe of the shad should be eaten soon because it grows stronger with age. Because of their small size and numerous bones, herring can best be used by salting them down and serving them as salt fish.

The annual migration of shad and herring up our coastal rivers celebrates the arrival of spring. Families and friends gather together in this celebration to feast as the Mattaponi and Pamunkey Indians have been doing for generations. An enjoyable way to experience the shad and herring run is to spend an afternoon with a friend on the river and "throw a net." The picking and cleaning afterwards is a chore, but the eating makes it all worthwhile. □



A big catch means a big tangle to be unraveled (left). A shad struggles to get free of the net (bottom). At the peak of the herring run, the angler's catch grows quickly (below).

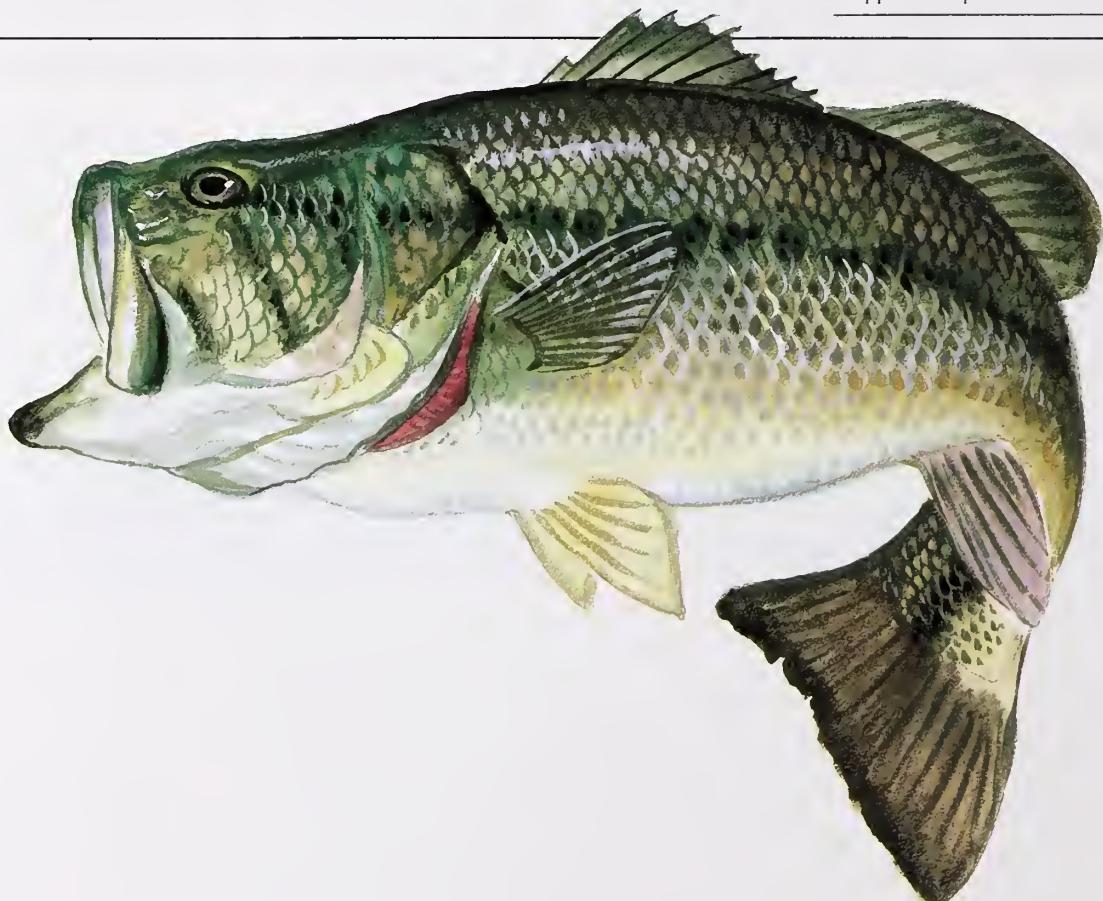


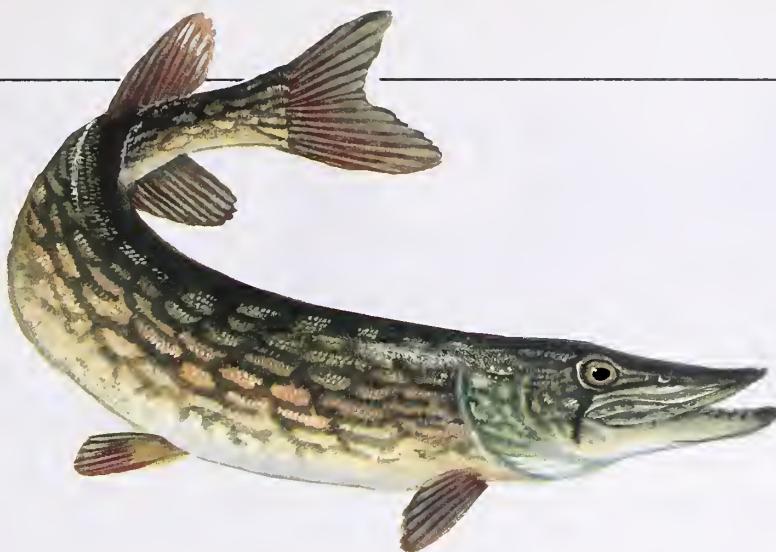
FRESHWATER FAVORITES

Art by Duane Raver

Largemouth Bass
(*Micropterus salmoides*)

The most popular sport fish in Virginia, the largemouth is found in rivers, lakes and farm ponds throughout the state. The state record for this scrapper is 14 pounds, 2 ounces.



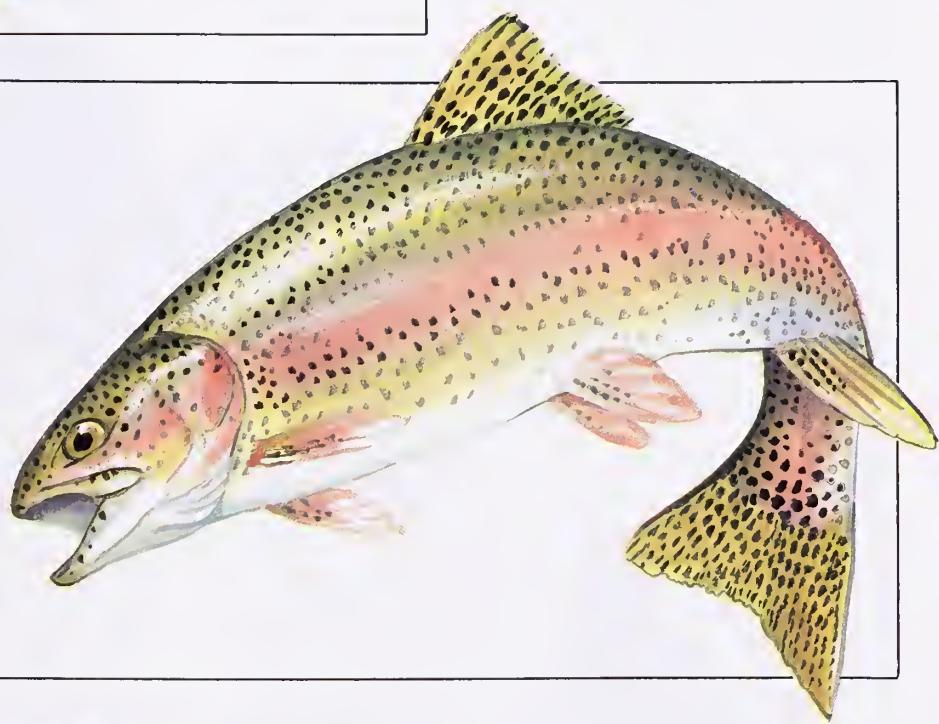


Chain Pickerel (*Esox niger*)

Streamlined fun in the water for any angler, pickerels like quiet grassy lakes and the quiet areas of many of our streams. The Virginia record is 7 pounds, 12 ounces.

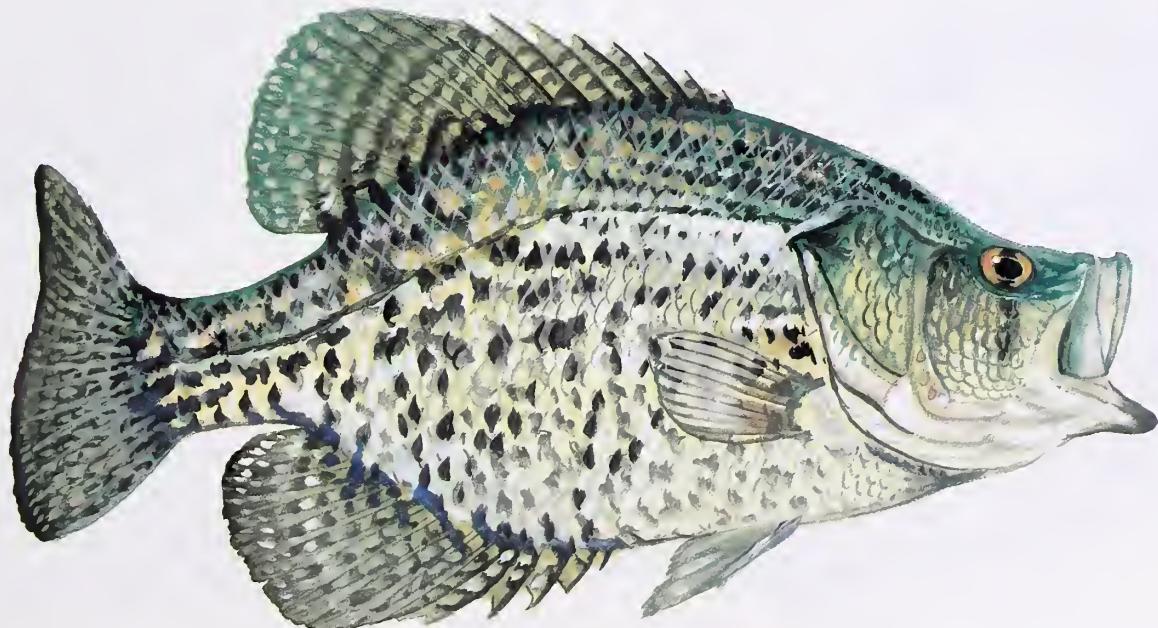
Rainbow Trout (*Salmo gairdneri*)

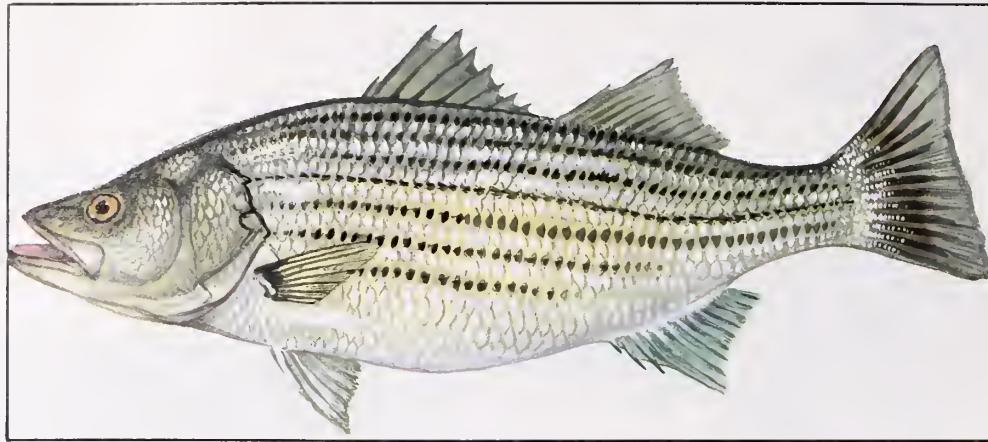
One of the most colorful and most common fishes found in our higher streams and cooler lakes. A traditional favorite, rainbow trout grow to 10 pounds, 12 ounces in Virginia.



Crappie (*Pomoxis spp*)

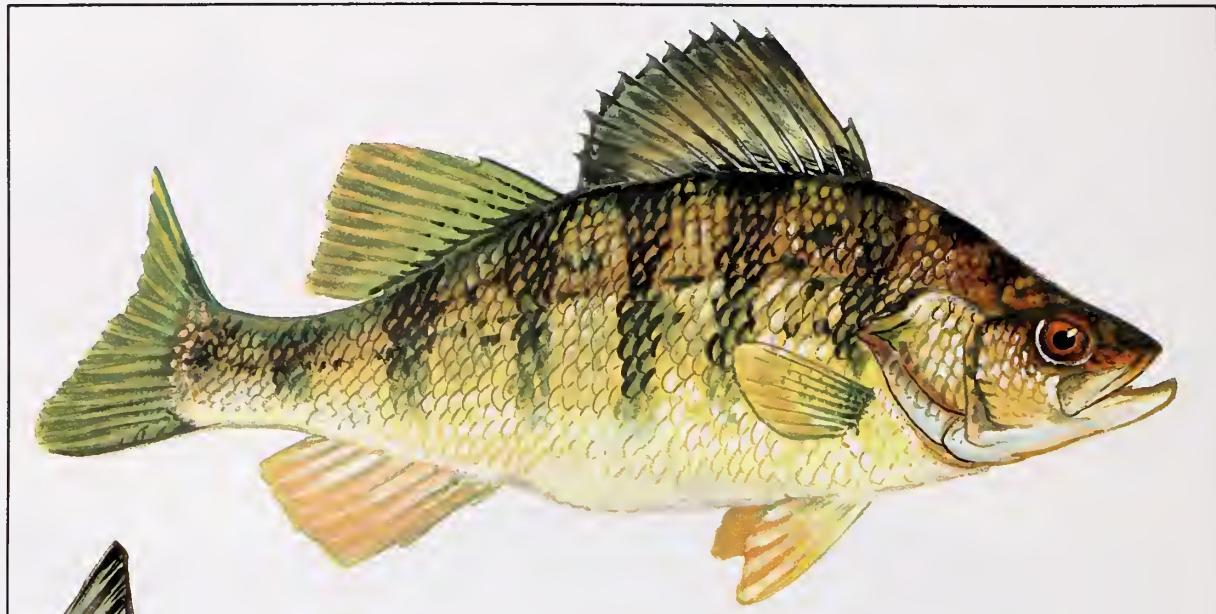
A sport fish that comes in numbers in Virginia that can easily fill your stringer. Both black and white crappie are found here. The state record is 4 pounds, 14 ounces.





Striped Bass (*Morone saxatilis*)

Once a fish of the open sea, this big bass is now landlocked and produced in Virginia. A good catch at almost any size, the state record is 39 pounds, 8 ounces.



Yellow Perch (*Perca flavescens*)

This little game fish likes quiet rivers and ponds. A native of Virginia, the "raccoon perch" is caught most readily on natural bait. State record is 2 pounds, 5 ounces.



Smallmouth Bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*)

Considered by many to be the scrappiest bass in Virginia, the smallmouth is basically a river fish. Providing a tail-walking battle, they can reach 8 pounds, the state record.

The Discount Factor

Those who listen to fish tales have learned to do so with jaded ears.
by Charley Dickey

One of Charley's Principles states that in any conversation between two or more fishermen, those listening crank in a discount factor. The factor varies with the angler who is speaking.

For instance, if a particular angler relates that he got a limit the first hour, you give him the benefit of the doubt and credit him with actually catching a limit in a day of fishing. For another fisherman, you would calculate the real truth as a day's limit caught in a week of hard fishing. For some, it might be the equivalent of a day's limit caught all season.

If an angler describing a lunker bass he allegedly caught says it jumped six feet into the air on its first jump, you can reasonably assume that he did hook a bass. After that, the discount factor must be cranked in. The bass might have jumped two feet in the air, it might have flung some spray or it could have rolled and shown a dorsal fin.

If the angler telling the story admits that the bass got away, he is likely to tell you one of three things. The bass looked like a world record, it was the biggest bass he ever hooked or the fish was a lake record. Using the discount factor, you can reasonably believe the bass weighed at least two pounds.

Wives learn to crank in their own discount factors. If an angler says he will be home for dinner at 7 p.m., that means he will arrive sometime between 8 p.m. and midnight. With a few anglers, it means they will get back the same week.

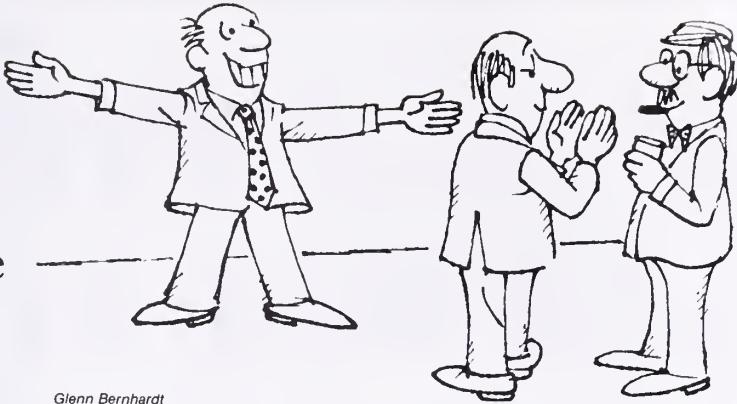
The wife has several choices. She can choose not to cook him any dinner at all, cook it and leave it on the stove or get mad at 11 p.m. and feed it to the dogs. If she has been married a long time, she will probably call one of her girl friends and take her to dinner at an expensive restaurant.

Bosses also develop discount factors. They become suspicious of employees who phone in to say they have toothaches on Friday mornings. When they receive a long-distance telephone call on Monday from an employee whose car has broken down, they discount.

In the final analysis, each fisherman is responsible for his own discount factor. For instance, I know a few anglers I will not believe without affidavits signed by three eyeball witnesses. If they come home from a trip with several large rainbow trout, I am reasonably sure they have done one of two things: they have stopped by a fee-fishing pond or a fish market.

If I run into certain anglers on the lake, and they have a big string of fish, I cannot help but ask what lures they were using. If they tell me they caught the fish on topwater plugs, I use the maximum discount factor and know the fish were hooked on the bottom with jigs or plastic worms.

Another of Charley's Principles states that if there is any advantage to be derived in relating a fish story, the person doing the relating will give the benefit to himself.



Glenn Bernhardt

For instance, if an angler catches a walleye weighing five pounds and one ounce, he will round off the weight to six pounds. Some anglers are so expert at rounding off numbers that they skip a couple. The final number is always on the high side. In the entire history of fishing, no angler has ever rounded off a number on the lower side.

When an angler tells me the bluegill he caught would cover a dinner plate, I discount that to a coffee saucer. Even that discount may give some anglers too much benefit. Perhaps I should more properly figure a butter dish.

Normal people, those who do not fish, may have trouble in accurately communicating with an angler. For instance, the angler may say his new son weighed 21 pounds at birth. Normal people, who do not realize this calls for a two-thirds discount factor, will likely be astounded. They have no way of knowing the boy weighed seven pounds.

In arriving at discount factors, time and distance from the event must be taken into consideration. If an old codger is telling about a big fish he caught 20 years ago, you know he has told the same story many times. You also know that the size of the fish has grown with each telling.

The listening fisherman also realizes that the old codger has told the story so many times he actually believes it happened. A high discount factor is cranked in. By now, the ancient catch may surpass the world record but there are no witnesses to verify the story. The fish was not mounted because "Back in those days we didn't know about records and ate everything we caught."

A high discount factor is cranked in. It saves useless arguments. You know you can't change the cold codger's mind. You let him keep his glorious memory.

Discount factors at a dock are low. You can see the fish and make your own appraisal. But you know the farther the angler is from where he caught the fish, the higher the discount factor should be.

The difficulty of being checked on is one reason some anglers make trips to foreign lands. Time and distance works for them and when they get home they can tell any stories they want without fear of being caught. They usually have "proof" in the form of some out-of-focus, under-exposed color prints showing a black blob which could be fish, oil spills or seaweed.

On the strength of repeated tales by a traveling angler friend, I once made a trip to an exotic land to fish where the big snook were so thick you could walk on them. On arriving, I was considerably taken aback to discover that snook did not inhabit that country or had ever been known to migrate there. In a way, it was my fault for not having cranked in a discount factor. But no snook at all? That almost gets into the lying department! □

From Creel to Platter

Preparing your catch for the table

by Joan Cone

Freshwater fishing is one of Virginia's most popular participant sports. Despite the growing number of anglers, there is little information on the best ways to preserve and cook our many freshwater varieties. Most of them are delicious, nourishing and easily prepared in appetizing ways that everyone will enjoy.

Here is a secret for freezing fish. By using it you can keep frozen fish at least a year. It involves a protective dip made of lemon juice and gelatin.

Protective Dip*

- 1 envelope (1 tablespoon) unflavored gelatin
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh or reconstituted lemon juice
- $1\frac{3}{4}$ cups water

Stir gelatin into cold water-lemon mixture. Heat over low heat, stirring constantly until gelatin is dissolved and mixture is almost clear. Cool to room temperature.

Fish can be whole, in steaks or fillets. Dip the fish into this lemon glaze and drain for several seconds before wrapping individually in a heavy plastic film. Then place within heavy duty plastic freezer bags for double protection, marking the date and other details, such as exact contents, on bag. The best size packages to freeze are those which represent a meal for your family.

Foiled Fish

- 4 pan-dressed trout, bass, crappie or other fish, $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ pounds each
- 2 cups sliced fresh mushrooms
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped onion
- 3 tablespoons butter or margarine
- 1 cup chopped, seeded, peeled tomato
- 2 tablespoons white table wine
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon seasoned salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon crushed thyme leaves
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon sugar
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon pepper

Thaw fish if frozen. Rinse fish and pat dry. Cook mushrooms and onions in butter just until onion is tender. Remove from heat and stir in remaining ingredients. Cut a piece of heavy duty aluminum foil twice the length of a baking pan approximately 16" x 10" x 1". Place foil in pan and lightly grease. Arrange fish in a single layer on foil. Stuff each fish with a tablespoon of sauce. Spread remaining sauce over top of fish. Bring foil up over fish and close all edges with tight double folds. Bake in a 350° oven for 25

to 30 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Carefully open the foil and serve fish with sauce. (Serves 4)

Poached Fish With Elegant Sauce*

- 2 to 4 whole small trout, bass, catfish or similar fish
- 1 cup water
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon instant minced onion
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sliced almonds
- 2 ounces mushrooms, sliced
- 2 tablespoons white table wine
- 2 tablespoons Half-and-Half

Place fish, water, bay leaf, onion, lemon juice and salt in a deep skillet or electric frypan. Cover and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Remove fish from skillet and place on a platter, covering with foil to keep warm. Remove bay leaf. For sauce, add butter and flour to liquid in skillet and whisk well with wire whisk. Heat gently, whisking all the time until a smooth, thickened sauce. Add mushrooms and almonds and simmer 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in wine and cream. Pour some sauce over fish and serve rest in a gravy dish. (Allow 1 fish per person)

Beer Batter Fillets

- 1 pound fish fillets, skinned
- Vegetable oil
- 3 to 4 tablespoons biscuit baking mix
- 1 cup biscuit baking mix
- 1 egg
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup beer

Heat oil (1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches) in heavy saucepan or deep-fat fryer to 350°. Lightly coat fish with 3 to 4 tablespoons baking mix. Mix 1 cup baking mix, egg, salt and beer until smooth. Dip fish into batter, letting excess drip into bowl. Fry fish until golden brown, about 2 minutes on each side; drain. Serve with soy sauce or vinegar if desired. (Serves 3)

Saucy Broccoli 'n Fish Bake

- 1 pound skinned fish fillets from a largemouth bass,



The pleasure of freshwater fishing in Virginia doesn't have to end once you've left the water for the day; prepare your catch with one of these delicious recipes, such as beer batter fillets (left).

striped bass, large catfish or similar fish
1 package (10 ounces) frozen broccoli spears
1 tablespoon lemon juice
Dill Sauce (below)
1 cup biscuit baking mix
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cold water
1 tablespoon butter or margarine, softened
1 tablespoon grated Parmesan cheese

Heat oven to 350°. Cook broccoli as directed on package; drain. Pat fish fillets dry; arrange lengthwise in ungreased rectangular baking dish, 12" x 7½" x 2". Sprinkle with lemon juice. Arrange broccoli spears crosswise on fish. Prepare Dill Sauce; pour over broccoli. Mix baking mix and water until soft dough forms; beat vigorously 20 strokes. Gently smooth dough into ball on floured cloth-covered board. Knead 5 times. Roll dough into rectangle, 8" x 5". Cut crosswise into 4 equal parts. Place lengthwise on broccoli. Brush with butter; sprinkle with cheese. Bake until fish flakes easily with fork, about 25 minutes. (Serves 4)

Dill Sauce

2 tablespoons butter or margarine
2 tablespoons biscuit baking mix
 $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon dried dill weed
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
 $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon pepper
1 cup milk

Heat butter in 1-quart saucepan over low heat until melted. Stir in baking mix, dill weed, salt and pepper. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until smooth and bubbly; remove from heat. Stir in milk. Heat to boiling, stirring constantly. Boil and stir 1 minute.

Golden Fish Chowder

1 to 2 pounds skinned fish fillets, cut into 1-inch chunks
1 package (5½ ounces) French's Au Gratin Potatoes
4 cups water
1 can (10¾ ounces) chicken broth
 $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground allspice
1 can (13 ounces) evaporated milk
parsley flakes

Combine potatoes and seasoning mix from package with water and chicken broth in large saucepan. Cover and simmer 15 minutes. Add fish and allspice. Simmer 5 minutes longer until potatoes are tender and fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Add milk and parsley

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flakes; heat gently. (Serves 4 to 5)

Gazpacho Fish Bundles

2 pounds skinned fish fillets
1 envelope (1½ ounces) American Style Spaghetti Sauce Mix
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup vinegar
2 tablespoons oil
2 medium tomatoes, chopped
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped cucumber

Tear off 6 pieces of heavy-duty foil about 18 inches long; fold in half. Cut fish in 6 pieces; arrange one piece fish on each piece of foil. Stir together spaghetti sauce mix, vinegar, oil, tomatoes and cucumber; place generous spoonful on each serving of fish. Wrap foil around fish, using double folds. Place on grill 3 to 4 inches above hot coals. Grill 15 to 25 minutes, turning frequently, until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. (Serves 6)

Microwave Oriental Fish Steaks

1½ pounds striped bass steaks or other fish steaks
3 tablespoons orange juice
3 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon catsup
1 tablespoon cooking oil
1 tablespoon chopped parsley
2 teaspoons lemon juice
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon oregano
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon pepper
 $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon minced garlic
1 large orange, peeled, seeded and sectioned
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sliced water chestnuts

Thaw fish if frozen. Place fish in a single layer in a 2-quart shallow casserole. In a small bowl, combine remaining ingredients, except orange and water chestnuts. Pour sauce over the fish; cover and let set in refrigerator for 30 minutes, turning once. Cover dish and cook on HIGH for 6 to 8 minutes, rotating dish every 3 minutes. Top steaks with orange sections and water chestnuts. Return to oven and cook on HIGH for 1 to 2 minutes. Let stand covered for 2 minutes. (Serves 4)

Starred (*) recipes are included in *Fish And Game Cooking* by Joan Cone, published 1981 by EPM Publications, McLean, Virginia.

Autographed copies of *Fish And Game Cooking* are available for \$9 ppd. from Joan Cone at P.O. Box 242, Department VW, Williamsburg, Virginia 23187. □

The Unpredictable Pickerel

“One can never tell what a pickerel will do before or after it hits your lure.”

by Bruce Ingram

It was a stifling hot late July afternoon some 13 summers ago, and I had experienced a miserable day of fishing. Nothing had gone right all day. Like most adolescents who enjoy fishing, I was hopelessly addicted to the belief that nightcrawlers were the only bait that could be used to entice fish.

However, on that particular day, I had not even caught any sunfish from my favorite farm pond. Not that I had expected to catch anything else. Once, I had landed a five-inch smallmouth on a nightcrawler. Several times, when the water was murky, I had even caught some brown bullheads. My one encounter with a redeye had ended when it escaped at the last possible moment.

I had spent the afternoon impaling nightcrawlers on my eagleclaws. Each time, I would drown the innocent creatures by dangling them some two feet below a motionless bobber. As each luckless nightcrawler would succumb to a lack of oxygen, I would replace it with another worm which would meet the same fate.

Finally, I was out of nightcrawlers and patience. But out of stubbornness born of youth, I was not ready to go home. I rustled through my tacklebox and found a silver imitation Mepps spinner that had been purchased months before in a moment of impetuosity. I clicked open my swivel, slipped in the spinner, and resumed my pursuit of pumpkinseed sunfish.

What happened next was to change my entire outlook on sunfish and the art of fishing. I cast the spinner into the middle of the pond and began to crank my reel furiously. I was mad at myself for having to use the spinner and for not having dug enough worms the night before. On about the fifth or sixth cast, my line became taut, and the word snag flashed through my mind. I yanked the rod back and a split second later the water 30 feet in front of me exploded.

Thus began my first encounter with *Esox niger*, the chain pickerel. By snapping the rod back, I had inadvertently set the hook. The pickerel had responded with a mighty leap out of the water. I immediately began to do battle with what I thought was the world's biggest sunfish.

Several breathless moments later, I had horsed the fish upon the bank and stood staring at what appeared to be a prehistoric creature. I scrambled up the bank with my prize and set out for home.

My fishing peers were called to my house. We had a lengthy argument concerning what manner of organism I had in my possession. Finally, with the help of an encyclopaedia, the mystery was solved.

Since that day in July, I have fished almost exclusively for chain pickerel. My mode of attack is simple and inexpensive: one silver 3½" Rebel, one red-and-white daredevil



Gerald Almy

spoon, two silver Mepps spinners, and one Mepps spinner each of gold and black. Two creeks in Craig County, Johns and Craigs, are where I go to do battle.

Johns Creek is by far my favorite of the two creeks for pickerel fishing. I like to go to a favorite spot at sunrise when there is just enough light for me not to have to worry about stepping on an unseen copperhead. I slide into the creek through an opening in the woods as the vapor is steaming from the creek.

I head for a "swamp bed" as I call them. A swamp bed is an area of mud and decaying leaves where elodea is growing. Add a submerged log and you have ideal chain pickerel habitat. Unfortunately, swamp beds give off the distinctive aroma of methane gas when one mucks about in them. This is a minor inconvenience when it is considered that a chain pickerel is the prey.

One memorable day last summer, I caught six chain pickerel out of swamp beds in a period of two hours. The biggest pike was only about 18 inches in length, and the smallest was barely a foot long. But it is the uniqueness of the species, not the size, that attracts me to *Esox niger*.

One can never tell what a pickerel will do before or after it hits your lure. One pike, on that day last summer, tailwalked his way across the creek thoroughly ruining the fishing in that particular area. Another pike was not landed entangled himself and my lure in a jungle

of elodea. The only thing retrieved was a bent lure and a gob of aquatic weed. The 12-inch junior edition traversed the creek several times before he finally stopped, gills heaving, at my feet. And a wily old lunker that got away, lethargically engulfed my spinner and disappeared under a log. The skirmish was over in five seconds with the fish conquering this pitiful human adversary. I was merely a temporary annoyance in the pickerel's day.

During my pursuit of chain pickerel, I occasionally catch a smallmouth bass which many consider the most regal species. I respect smallmouth but it is the pickerel that has captured my affections. I never keep any of the pickerel that I have caught, always carefully releasing them. My goal is never to touch them. When the battle is over, I give my quarry some slack line and the fish usually shakes the hook out.

Sometimes, I have to give a pickerel artificial respiration. This is done by pointing the fish upstream and gently pulling him downstream. This method forces oxygenated water into its gills.

So you can have your largemouth bass, your stripers, and your domesticated hatchery trout. Give me a cool mountain stream, some swamp beds, some elodea, and a submerged log, and I will take my chances with the great, green pickerel. □



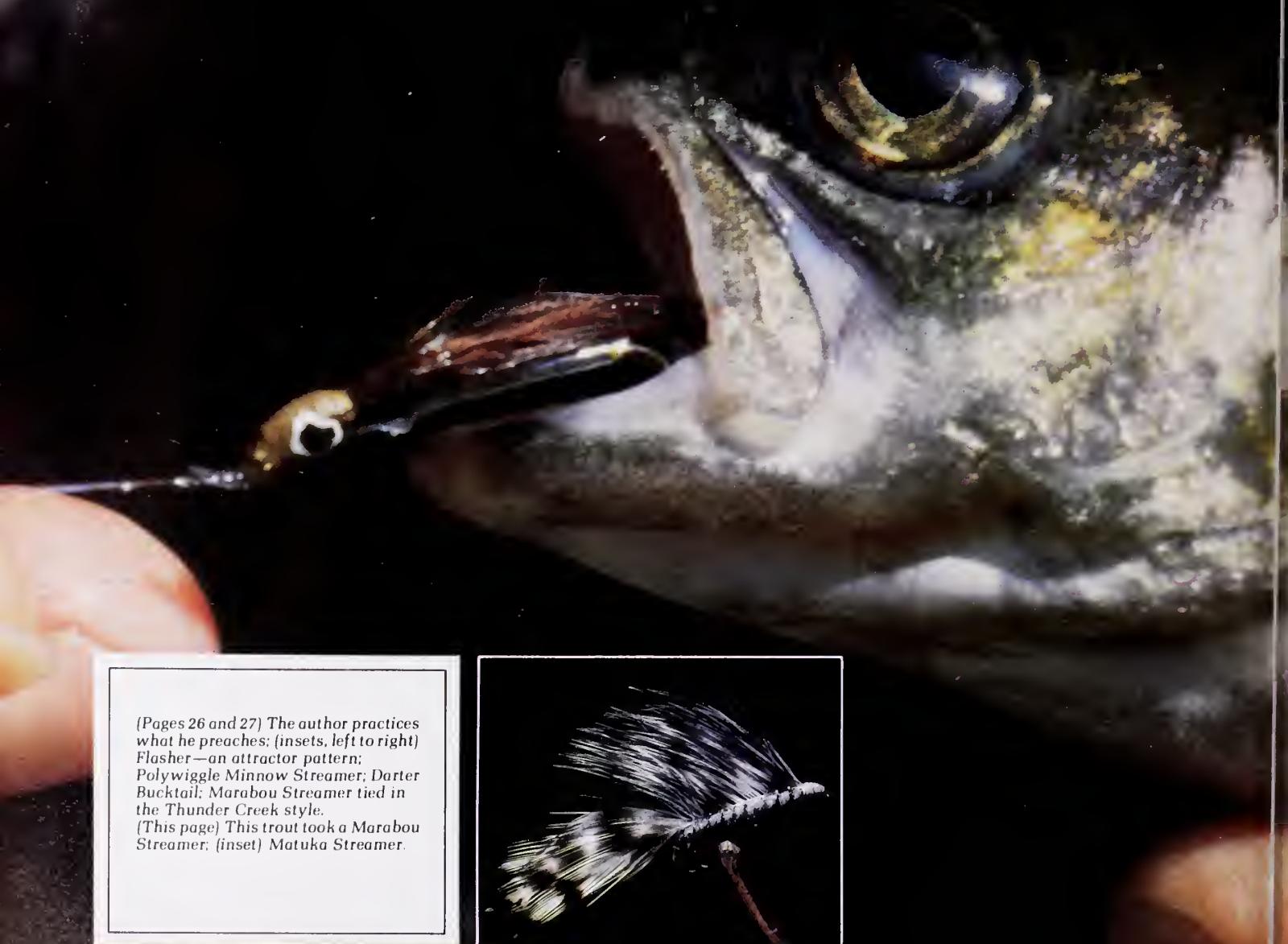
Clara Eastby

TROUT TAMERS

BY ALLEN G. EASTBY



**"Remember, streamers, Boy,
or maybe a bucktail—that's
the way to catch trout."**



(Pages 26 and 27) The author practices what he preaches; (insets, left to right) Flasher—an attractor pattern; Polywiggle Minnow Streamer; Darter Bucktail; Marabou Streamer tied in the Thunder Creek style.
(This page) This trout took a Marabou Streamer. (Inset) Matuka Streamer.



For most trout fishermen, streamers and bucktails are gaudy things, nice to look at, but not used very often. Maybe once in a while, once in a great while, a streamer is knotted onto the business end of a leader and given a brief try before it is replaced with a Gold Ribbed Hare's Ear or a Royal Coachman. Then the streamer is tucked away in the corner of the fly box and forgotten.

But there is a handful of anglers who know better. For these fishermen, streamers and bucktails are more than quaint feather dusters, more than a last desperate chance to catch a fish. No indeed, there are some fly rodgers—still only a few, but there is a steady stream of recruits swelling the ranks—who know that streamers and bucktails are among the most effective flies ever devised, who know that streamers and bucktails will bring trout to net from opening day right through the summer. However, they also know that not every streamer or bucktail is effective and that the "chuck it and chance it" method of fishing them is worse than useless.

There are literally dozens of methods for presenting streamers and bucktails, dozens of ways to show them to the fish. But for trout fishermen, the relatively small size of most streams limits what can be done. Under most conditions, trout anglers have only two choices: they can fish streamers and bucktails upstream or downstream.

The downstream method is simplicity itself. All that has to be done is to cast downstream and then retrieve the fly. Of course, this can be refined, the speed of the retrieve can be varied, and pauses, twitches, and jiggles of the rod tip can punctuate the retrieve. It's easy enough to maneuver the fly into all likely holding areas, and on one cast, a fairly substantial segment of stream can be covered. But this tactic, to put it bluntly, is not all that effective. It does work during high water periods (especially early in the season) and on freshly stocked trout. However, once trout have become accustomed to their surroundings, or if you're working over stream-bred fish, a downstream approach is not the best way to do the job. An angler lumbering along and what is supposed to be a baitfish crazily hopping and skipping around are likely to scare the spots off any trout in the vicinity. Still, for early season work or on a rain swollen stream, there's nothing wrong with a downstream cast and an upstream retrieve.

A downstream presentation is positively deadly during a hatch—an emergence of aquatic insects—when trout are rising. If the fish reject the dry fly

(as they sometimes do), clinch an imitation of a small trout onto a leader, keeping low and out of sight as much as possible, work your way well above the fish, and cast. But make the cast short so fly, leader, and line don't land on top of the rising fish. Feed out line slowly so the bucktail floats down to where the fish is rising. Then jiggle the fly about and get ready. A trout can't stand it when another fish, especially another trout, tries to take over its feeding location. Initially the trout will try to drive the interloper out, but of course the bucktail will stay put. Provoked beyond endurance by the antics of the little competitor, the trout will clobber it. On a couple of occasions, I've had the rod knocked right out of my hands. You'd be surprised at the power and ferocity of a 12-inch trout.

Fishing a streamer or bucktail upstream, and doing it properly, does take some getting used to and some practice, but it's worth it. The fly is cast and then allowed to float down with the current. What an angler should strive for is a natural float, one with as little drag as possible. To trout, the fly should appear to be an injured minnow too hurt, weak, or tired to fight the flow. There's seldom any problem detecting a strike: fish hammer drifting streamers and bucktails hard, usually hooking themselves. But you do have to watch your slack line, keeping it under control and out of the way. It does take some practice to learn how far above a known or suspected trout you should cast so the fly will come down as deep as possible. On most small streams, this is not critical. But wherever the water is deep (say, on a larger stream or even a fair-sized pool), it takes a while before you can judge just where you want the fly to land. And this is something every angler has to work out for himself (or herself) since it will vary with the length and type of leader, the size of the fly, the materials used in the fly (a feather streamer will sink faster than a bucktail), and the speed of the current. But with patience and perseverance, anyone can master the technique of presenting a streamer or bucktail upstream.

One of the problems facing an angler who wants to try streamers or bucktails is selecting which ones to use from the hundreds of patterns and the more than a score of "styles" available. Nowadays, venerable patterns such as the Gray Ghost, Warden's Worry, Colonel Bates, and the Edson Tigers share space in catalogs and tackleshop display cases with Matukas and Marabou Muddlers. There are streamers imitating every kind of baitfish that swims and there are bucktails by the

bucketful ranging from Art Flick's Black Nosed Dace to the new and marvelously effective "Thunder Creek" patterns and the polypropylene "Polly Wiggle" flies. There are also attractors like the old reliable Mickey Finn and the bizarre Flasher. It's hard to choose the right ones.

For someone just getting started, a good selection of streamers and bucktails would include a half dozen flies: a Black Nosed Dace (either a Thunder Creek pattern or a traditional one), Marabou Streamers in black and white and olive and white, a grizzly Matuka, and any one of the jazzy, flashy attractors. As they get more and more involved in streamer and bucktail fishing, most anglers want to add to this basic pattern selection. The best way to do this is to stick to two or three "styles" of fly (such as Matukas or Thunder Creeks) and carry them in different colors and sizes. If possible, the best thing to do is find out what kinds of small fish share streams with trout and imitate them as closely as possible. While the attractor patterns do work, the most consistently effective flies are imitations of baitfish that the trout are used to seeing and eating.

A couple of seasons ago, I spent a lot of time fishing a small brook trout stream. It was a fair hike from the road to the area I liked, so I seldom saw other fishermen. But one early summer day, a car was already tucked into the little pullout on the dirt road when I arrived. Since there was more than enough water—and I really didn't mind sharing the stream too much—I headed on upstream.

After toiling through the pathless tangle of evergreens for fifteen minutes, I came up to the other fisherman. He was putting on a show almost as if he had an audience: his casts were short, accurate, and delicate, and every second or third cast he caught a trout. When he hooked, landed, and released a really fine brook trout (better than a foot long), I couldn't contain myself any longer, so I called out, saying hello and asking what he was using.

He slouched over to show me the small Black Nosed Dace bucktail clinched onto his leader and I had to smile. It was, he told me, only the second time in his life he had used a bucktail. It wasn't going to be the last time. As I headed on upstream, now anxious to get my own bucktail into the water, the fisherman called out, "Remember, streamers, Boy, or maybe a bucktail, that's the way to catch a trout."

The little band of trout fishermen who know, use, and appreciate streamers and bucktails had gained another recruit. □

by Jack Randolph



The Slot for Crappie

When the dam across the Appomattox River above Petersburg was completed in 1967, some anglers looked upon the lake forming behind it as a symbol of the end of an era. The stretch of river that was to form the channel of Lake Chesdin was a little-known, yet beloved fishing hole for some local anglers.

The rising waters flooded banks upon which old timers had fond memories of misty winter days, a campfire and several cane poles stuck in the sod, awaiting the subtle signal that a sucker had taken a worm. The waters covered favorite catfish holes, and the great trees that lined the river were gone now, sacrificed to clean drinking water and progress. As their river sunk beneath the rising flood, the locals hoped that the new lake would be a fair trade-off for their paradise lost.

Anglers who had never fished the Appomattox before the dam was built looked upon the growing 3,000-acre lake with anticipation, hoping that the new, broad waters would bring a bass bonanza similar to the early days of Lake Gaston.

After a suitable period, the lake started to produce fish. Pickerel that did well in the river did better in the lake. Bass, while small, were numerous and a few medium-sized state-stocked walleyes and stripers were caught. But somehow, Chesdin never seemed to catch hold. The aquatic grasses faded away and with them went most of the pickerel. Stunted crappie, bream and bass were plentiful, but hardly worth the effort. Catfish, too, were small.

In these early days, biologists were challenged to try to create a fishery in a lake managed for water supply. The water authority was plagued with algae in the lake and their efforts to control it were not always compatible with fish management techniques. But both interests benefitted from a spirit of cooperation, spawning techniques that permitted the public to have their water and fish, too.

In 1977, rotenone samplings by Commission biologist Charlie Sledd determined that there simply weren't enough small bait fish present in the lake to support the growth of the bass and crappie. Despite substantial stockings of alewives in 1968 and 1971, few remained. The main bait fish in the lake were shiners and only about seven pounds per surface acre of these were there.

Sledd's findings also concluded that the growth rate of bass was below normal, which was to be expected in a lake where bass food was in short supply. About 57 percent of the bass population in the lake was less than 12 inches long. Because of the shortage of bigger bass, there weren't enough big predators present in Chesdin to control the stunted crappie and bluegill populations. The keen competition for food had also retarded the growth of the channel catfish in the lake.

Based on his findings, Sledd recommended that a slot limit be imposed at Chesdin. This concept, tried elsewhere, but unique to Virginia, permitted anglers to keep all bass

under 12 inches in length and over 15 inches. By encouraging anglers to keep the smaller bass, perhaps the crowded ranks of small fish could be thinned out. By protecting the bass in the 12- to 15-inch range, Sledd hoped to maintain a viable spawning population, and at the same time, increase the number of larger predators to impose some controls on the stunted crappie and bluegill populations. If the numbers of these panfish could be reduced, the competition among them could be lessened, resulting in larger fish.

The second part of Sledd's plan was to increase the base of bait or forage fish. Due to changes in the procedures to maintain high drinking water quality in the lake by the Water Authority, chances for survival of alewives and threadfin shad had improved.

The slot limit was established in 1979 and the stocking of threadfin shad and alewives resumed that spring.

Things started to happen almost immediately. The threadfin shad took off like dynamite. Before long, there was a thriving population of these little fish, providing a banquet for Chesdin's bass and crappie populations. Unfortunately, threadfin shad are vulnerable to severe, in fact, total winter kill and they all perished the first winter. Securing threadfins for annual stocking is difficult, particularly in recent years since the drought has influenced the availability of these fish which are obtained from North Carolina.

Fortunately, gizzard shad and alewives survived the winter and the forage or bait fish base in Chesdin has expanded dramatically. It has increased from the pathetic seven pounds per surface acre in 1977 to a respectable 90 pounds per surface acre in 1981.

Anglers have accepted the slot limit with mixed emotions. It is now common for a fisherman who knows how to catch bass to land a dozen fish in the 12- to 15-inch class in a day. More than the normal supply of will power is required to release these nice fish, but to the anglers' credit, they have generally respected the law. On the other hand, it is difficult for a bass fisherman to keep a bass under 12 inches in length after years of training to release the little ones. The problem is similar to convincing hunters they must harvest female deer.

According to Sledd's figures, from 1976 to 1980 an average three-year-old bass in Chesdin was 10.7 inches long. Now the average three-year-old is 13.3 inches long. In 1977, 56 percent of the bass population consisted of intermediate size fish. Now, 13 percent of the bass population is in this category.

Anglers are now catching more and bigger bass from Chesdin than ever before. Although the final tally is not yet in, the production of lunker bass, over eight pounds, is picking up. It will probably increase in the future as more bass anglers recognize the potential of this lake.

But this is not simply a bass success story. Although the main thrust of the program appears to be aimed at largemouth bass, it turns out that the bass are the "Bull Moose" of this fishery, because what is good for the bass is good for the entire fishery.

It started with a flurry of crappie activity in the spring of 1980. It was late April when the crappie really turned on and anglers fishing out of Allen's Marina on Namozine Creek and Whippernock Marina on Whippernock Creek were amazed to run into schools of crappie that had grown up. No stunted crappie were these. Fish over a pound that used to draw a cord became almost common, and a few two-pounders appeared before the crappie shut down for the summer in mid-May.

In July, which is not exactly considered prime time for crappie, the fish turned on again. They hit like crazy through August and continued to rampage through the fall and into the winter until the lake was frozen over. The average size of the fish was respectable; so good, in fact, that anglers were able to cull their catches, keeping fish a half pound or better. Citation crappie weighing over 2½ pounds began to appear, and in 1981 some three-pound fish made appearances.

The crappie explosion at Chesdin can be traced to two factors: the abundance of small shad and alewife minnows, and the increased predation by bass. The crappie numbers were being kept somewhat in balance with their food supply which had increased substantially. Commission biologists hope that angler interest in crappies will remain high, because removal of appreciable numbers by anglers each year helps rather than hurts the future of these fine game fish.

Although crappies are plentiful in Chesdin, an angler must take time to learn the lake if he wants to catch many. Through the outstanding cooperation of personnel of the Continental Forest Industries Corporation, some trees have been felled into the lake to offer cover for fish. These trees and other sunken brushpiles are the crappie hang-outs the anglers must find. Chesdin crappie, of course, will attack tiny minnows with gusto, but anglers clean up using a wide variety of jigs and small spinners.

Bluegills have been another beneficiary of Sledd's handiwork. Not known as a good lake for bream, Chesdin has suddenly begun to blossom with hefty strings of nice bluegills, including a few citation-size fish. The bream renaissance is due to the increased number of larger predatory bass. The bass feed on the bluegills more extensively, reducing competition between the bream for available food. The result is a larger, more viable bluegill.

Because of the excellent crappie fishing available, relatively few anglers have turned their attention to the bream. Some hardly realize that they are there. Indirectly, the bluegills are also dependent upon the large population of bait fish. Although the bream eat few baitfish them-

selves, the bait stimulates the growth of bass that prey upon the smaller bluegills, setting in gear the events that are a part of natural selection.

Anglers all over Virginia were surprised when Chesdin produced a new state-record channel catfish, a whopper that weighed 32 pounds. Caught by a bank fisherman on cut herring, the catch was surprising because Chesdin had produced very few citation channel cats. The lake attracts a good number of jug fishermen and a few night bank anglers who fish exclusively for cats. While we have heard stories of classic struggles with big catfish that smashed heavy tackle, Chesdin's catfishing still remains a sleeper, worthy of exploration by dedicated and experienced catfishermen.

Many anglers frequently ask when the slot limit will be removed from Lake Chesdin. This decision will be based upon growth rate of the bass and an analysis of the impact of the bass population on the other species of fish in the lake. For sure, the forage fish must be maintained in good supply if the excellent growth rates are to continue.

The Lake Chesdin experience illustrates some very important considerations. Although largemouth bass are the "glamour fish" of the lake, it is not possible to manage the lake for bass without having a profound impact on the other species that have equal popularity among anglers.

The Chesdin experience illustrates the need to consider all species when making management decisions. Happily, in this case, good management practices for bass have benefitted the other species as well.

Cooperation has been the real secret to the success enjoyed at Chesdin. Nothing would have been possible without the wholehearted help of the Appomatox Water Authority, the public, and from landowners bordering the lake.

Public cooperation, of course, is essential. It goes beyond simply obeying the law, particularly the slot limit. Catching and keeping small bass, while repugnant to some, is essential to the success of the program. Why throw back that little bass, if by doing so you are actually hurting the chances of some other bass to grow through the slot and become someone's citation?

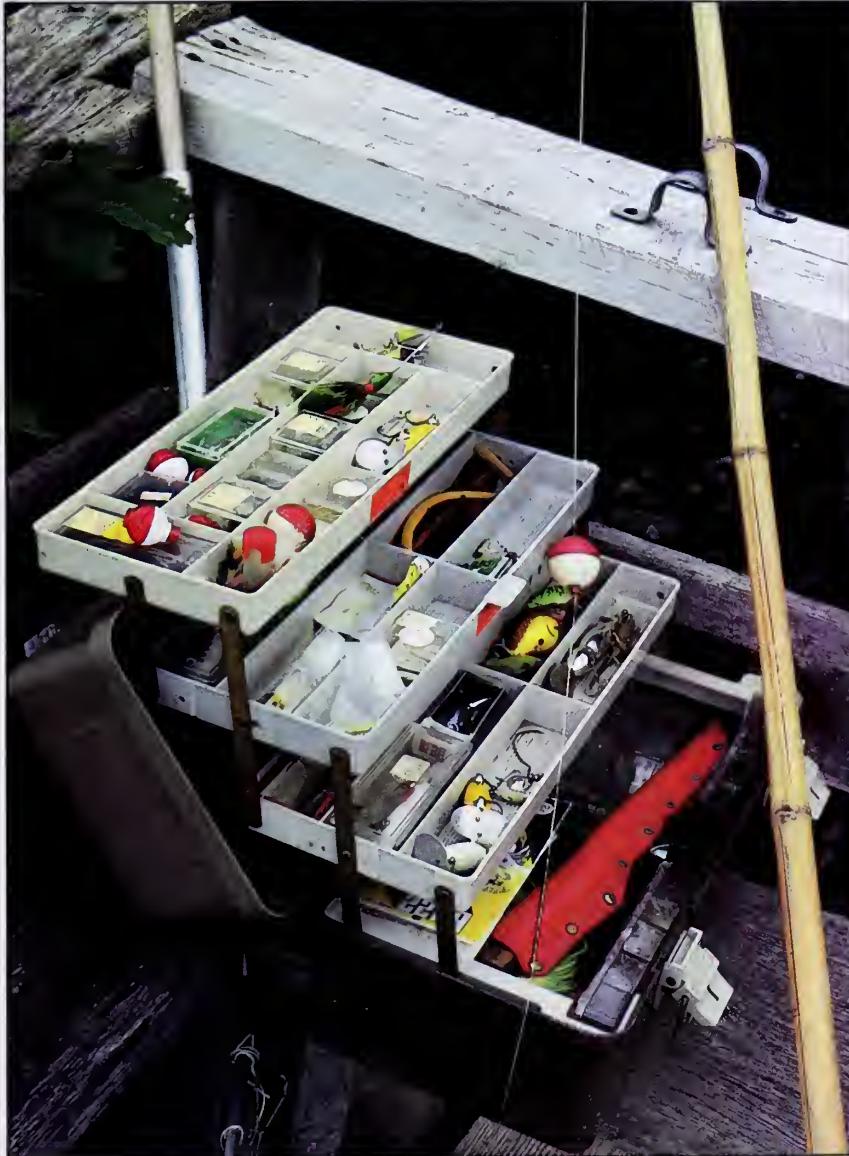
Perhaps the greatest help the public has offered so far is the endorsement of the slot limit and its patience in letting it work. Of course, we owe a lot to one dedicated biologist, Charlie Sledd, who has refused to let a lake die.

Now that the fishing has finally begun to improve on the lake, the old anglers who look upon the days when the land, now covered with water, was a beautiful lazy river running between rows of great oaks, sycamores and gums, can see some justice in losing their river to make something better for all of us. □

Jack Randolph is deputy assistant director of the Game Commission.

by Gerald Almy

The Tackle Box DILEMMA



Robin Schroeder

If your tackle box is anything like the average fisherman's, it's a MESS. Lures are piled helter-skelter in the trays—surface plugs on top of spoons on top of crankbaits. Plastic worms are scattered about, some of them half-melted onto plugs and hooks. Split shot, those vital bits of crimp-on lead, are everywhere—some squeezed tighter than a fistful of hundred dollar bills, some open. Hooks of random sizes are scattered about, mixed in different boxes, some rusty, some with knots on the ends. Bits of weeds cling to the treble hooks of decrepit wobblers. A pork eel floats in a putrid concoction down in the bottom of the box, its lid sealed shut for eternity. Rusty gigs for those once-a-decade frog hunts stare bleakly from the box. Panfish, trout, catfish and bass weapons are heaped in randomly, without order or logic.

Of course, the main problem with this is that when you're looking for a certain lure or particular size of hook, it often takes several precious seconds to find it; sometimes minutes. Occasionally your gear will be in such disarray that you never uncover the wanted item, even though you know well and good that it's there! All of this means far too much

fishing time wasted on tackle-searching.

Why is a messy tacklebox such a universal problem? The answer isn't that all fishermen are slobs. Of course not. We just love to fish. And when we're out on the water, we don't want to take the extra second required to put something back in its proper place, with line clipped off and weeds removed. After all, that's an extra second or two of fishing time we're missing!

So we delude ourselves and toss things randomly back



Separating different types of tackle in different boxes lets you find just what you want easily and quickly, such as plastic worms, shown here.

into the box until it becomes such a cluttered, disgusting mess that we are forced to do a major overhaul. Actually, taking the few spare seconds required to keep the box neat in the first place by putting items back in their allotted space is the best policy. It's the only way to keep a box organized and easy to use over more than a few fishing trips.

It really doesn't take any more time to put a lure back in its proper tray than it does to put it in the wrong one, if you think about it. And if you need that item again on your next fishing trip, you'll be glad you put it where it's supposed to be.

But assuming you're like the majority of anglers and have a mess on your hands, let's take a look at the best way to clean it up and also put some system into the method in which you store your lures and ancillary fishing gear.

First of all, do you have the right tackle box or boxes? It's a rare angler that doesn't buy too small of a tackle box the first time around. After all, how do we know our interest in this sport is going to last, let alone grow? "Lures are expensive. . . We won't likely fill up that small model very quickly," we tell ourselves.

So goes the rationalization. And before a trout can snatch a mayfly from the surface, we've filled the dinky box up to the brim and then some.

So we go to a slightly bigger box. And the same thing happens in another year or two—less if you're really a hopelessly addicted fanatic. This goes on for too many

times, and the next thing you know you're up to a pretty good sized box, have it filled with all sorts of lures and plastic miscellaneous gear, and it's getting heavy to carry, difficult to find things in, and still not big enough!

I've been through the vicious cycle. But the last time I did some serious re-analyzing when I faced the prospect of buying yet a larger tackle box—this one probably in the \$35 to \$40 range.

That's a big chunk out of most any angler's pocketbook. Also, fishing mainly out of johnboats and canoes, as I do, puts space at a premium. A huge tackle box would simply take up too much room in my small boats.

One day I got to snooping around in the debris that always seems to accumulate in garages and noticed all those slightly smaller tackle boxes discarded from previous years. At the same time, it occurred to me how silly it was to carry trout and saltwater tackle mixed in this huge box when I was going bass fishing.

A plan formulated itself in my head. Each type of fishing would have its own box. The tackle box I was currently using would have plenty of space for neat, orderly organization of its contents if all my crankbaits and worms weren't in there. Or the four-ounce pyramid sinkers. Or the fly fishing gear.

That \$40 could be put to much better use than a new huge box. Say a new rod, a reel. . . Probably the suitcase would have weighed too much to carry by the time everything was loaded into it anyway. *continued on page 35*

*Introducing
"FLORIDA BASS"*

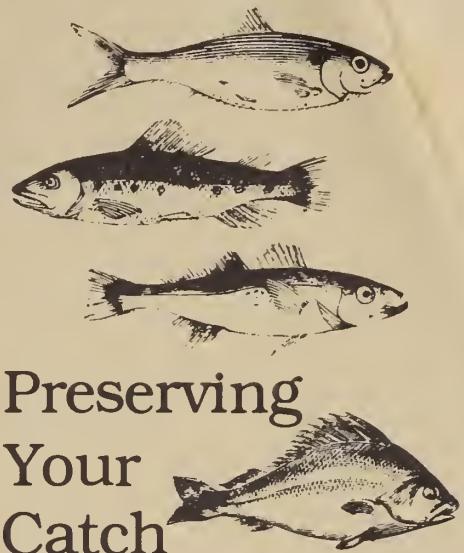


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Preserving Your Catch

by John Traister

Any time any of us has an abundance of fish that we can't utilize right away, chances are we're either going to give some away to our neighbors or else they go into the freezer for later use. However, there may be times when it's not practical to freeze a catch immediately; we may be away from home for a week or two... the freezer may already be full from a side of beef we just purchased... we may not have a freezer. There are still other ways to preserve fish without refrigeration, including brine curing, dry salting, smoking and canning. Fish prepared in any of these ways will last for weeks in some cases, and for months or even years in others.

Regardless of the method used, there are certain precautions that should be taken:

1. Treat all fish with care during killing, cleaning, salting, storing, etc. When the fish is caught, kill it immediately to prevent it from bruising itself as it flops around on the ground or in the boat.
2. Keep the fish cool—below 70°F until your preserving process begins. Decomposition begins as soon as the fish is killed. This decomposition is desirable for meats such as beef and venison because it tenderizes the meat. With fish, however, the flesh loses its firmness and good flavor, and will spoil quickly. If ice is available, the fish should be kept on it. If not, you should begin the curing process immediately.

3. Clean the fish as soon as it is killed. On some fish, it is best to remove the skin; on others, it is best to leave the skin on.

Brine Curing

In general, fish for brine curing should be split down the backbone so that they will lay flat. Then cut them in pieces that will fit into your container. Thoroughly wash the fish in water containing a little salt (salt water is fine). Place a layer of coarse salt on the bottom of a tight keg or crock, then spread a layer of fish on it; sprinkle a thick layer of salt over these, and add another layer of fish. Repeat this operation until the keg is full or your supply of fish is exhausted.

The salt and moisture from the fish will make a strong brine that will completely cover all the fish in the container. You can start eating them at any time, but if the supply is not depleted within say, ten days, remove the remaining fish from the container, wash them thoroughly, and repack them in the keg. Then cover them with a freshly made brine strong enough to float an egg. A week later, the above process should be repeated.

The keg should be tightly covered and stored in a cool place. When you're ready to eat some of the fish, freshen the fish in several changes of cold water overnight to remove the salt. They should then be cooked and eaten immediately.

The length of time the fish will last depends on the weather, the freshness of the fish, and the amount of care used in the salting process.

Dry Curing

Fish for dry curing should be split down the back so that the pieces will lay flat. Then soak them in salt water for about 45 minutes before drying the fish thoroughly. A fine salt should be poured into a shallow wooden box to dredge the fish in. Rub the salt into the fish well before laying each piece of fish on a thick layer of salt. The pieces should not touch each other. Then scatter a thick layer of salt on top. Leave the fish in this mixture for approximately two days before taking the fish out of the mixture and then scrub them well to remove all excess salt and dirt.

Once cleaned, the fish are placed on drying racks which are not located in the direct rays of the sun. Here they

should dry for four or five days. However, the fish should be gathered up at night and placed under shelter to prevent spoilage through dampness.

When dry, store the fish in a wooden container and keep them as cool and dry as possible. Should mold appear, scrub the fish off in salt water and dry in the air a day or two more.

Smoking

Smoking fish is not only a very practical way to preserve them, but in a lot of cases, the process also improves the flavor.

Before smoking, the fish should first be prepared as for dry curing. However, instead of air drying as described previously, the fish are placed on racks in a smoke house—like a wooden box or commercial smoker—and smoked for several hours. Just don't let the fire get too hot (over 100°F), or the fish will cook rather than smoke.

When I'm around electricity, I use a commercial aluminum smoker which will cure up to 25 pounds of fish at a time. The electric flavor pan is connected to 120-volt current and hickory chips are placed in the pan.

If electricity is not available at the curing site, I use a propane camp stove known commercially as the Kangaroo Kitchen. While space is limited in this camp stove, it smokes as well as any. You can also sprinkle hickory chips around the coals of your outside barbecue, and place a wooden box with holes drilled over the fire. Racks or hooks should be provided inside the box to hold the fish. But again, be careful not to let the fire get too hot.

Canning

Canning fish is certainly nothing new. . .most of us have been eating canned sardines for years. Canning is not only a good means to preserve fish when refrigeration is not available, it also makes certain "trash" fish taste better. For example, I know of several outdoorsmen who'll swear that carp is a fine fish if prepared in just the right way. Gentlemen, this might be true, but I've yet to find the correct way. My wife has used every gourmet recipe in the book on carp and I've never asked for seconds. . .not until I tasted some canned carp.

The fish is cleaned in the usual way, skinned and wiped dry. Cut it in large pieces (leaving backbone in) to fit in the container. Then pack dry in clean,

hot jars to within one inch of the top. Add one teaspoon salt and one teaspoon of butter or lard to each jar. Place lids on and process in pressure cooker at 10 pounds pressure for about 80 minutes. The result is a delightful dish which tastes somewhat like salmon. The bones become soft during the processing and nothing is wasted. Can only in pint jars.

If canning improves the taste of fish like carp, bass or bluegill must be super prepared this way—although I have never tried them. The tough freshwater mussel should also become highly palatable when canned this way. □

Bowfishing: A Challenge

by Chuck Roberts

As the warming months of early spring signal a growing restlessness among those previously affected with a confining case of cabin fever, reels and rods and boats and wading boots are retrieved from traditional garage niches and there's talk of big bass in the shallows and stacks of crappie in the brush piles.

But while fishing with reel and rod is of course a traditional spring activity, there's a new breed of fishing person whose blood also begins to stir with rising water temperatures: the bowfisherman. . .archery's counterpart of ole' Izzak Walton.

While the traditional reel 'n' rodder pursues a vast assortment of fishes of the shallow and deep, the bowfisherman is left with what are considered by many to be the dregs of the piscatorial world. But, so be it, because to the bowfisherman, wading the knee-deep quiet water sloughs and watching intently for the tell-tale swirls of rolling carp is solace and excitement enough.

How do you do it? What does it take to get started with this tremendous sport that's gaining the attention of many heretofore conventional anglers? The reel is important. It must be fast, tangle-free and be able to hold 70- to 100-pound braided line. Big spin-cast reels such as the Zebco 808 and 888 are popular favorites. They handle heavy line well, provide fast recovery for

second shots and have the power to handle bulldogging carp headed for deep water.

While few fish are encountered that could actually break the heavy line, it must be strong enough to pull arrows out of debris-covered bottoms in case of a miss. Of course, 40-50 pound carp can make a shambles out of the sturdiest of equipment.

Almost any bow will do for the bowfisherman whose shots are measured in feet. Bowfishing enthusiasts recommend bow weights over 35 pounds in order to propel the heavy, solid glass fish arrows with enough force to penetrate fish that may be as deep as five feet. For bigger-than-average carp (over 10 pounds) or hefty gar, heavier bows are used by the serious shooters.

Shooting fish can be a fast and furious sport when you locate a large concentration of spawning or feeding carp. The shooting is close and tricky as light refraction creates optical illusions. Mr. Carp may not be exactly where he looks to be and figuring the proper angle usually means a few misses. The key to this situation is aiming under the fish unless, of course, one gets into the classic shallow water situation where the fish are literally half out of the water. In this case, direct aiming applies.



For the person who wants to get into this exciting sport, we recommend *The Ken Brown Guide to Bowfishing*. It sells for around a ten dollar bill and covers most everything a bowfisherman needs to know including equipment, techniques, recipes, etc. Although

available nationally, we're told it can be found for sure at Bear Archery, 4600 S.W. 41st Blvd., Gainsville, Florida 32068; Jim Dougherty Archery, 4303 E. Pine Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74115; and Martin Archery, RR 5, Box 1127, Walla Walla, Washington 99362. □



Are You Hooked?

by Martin De Harte

If you go fishing often, the odds are that you will get a fish hook embedded in your flesh. Those of you who have suffered such a misfortune can attest to the painful procedure required to extract it. Well, it shouldn't have hurt that much.

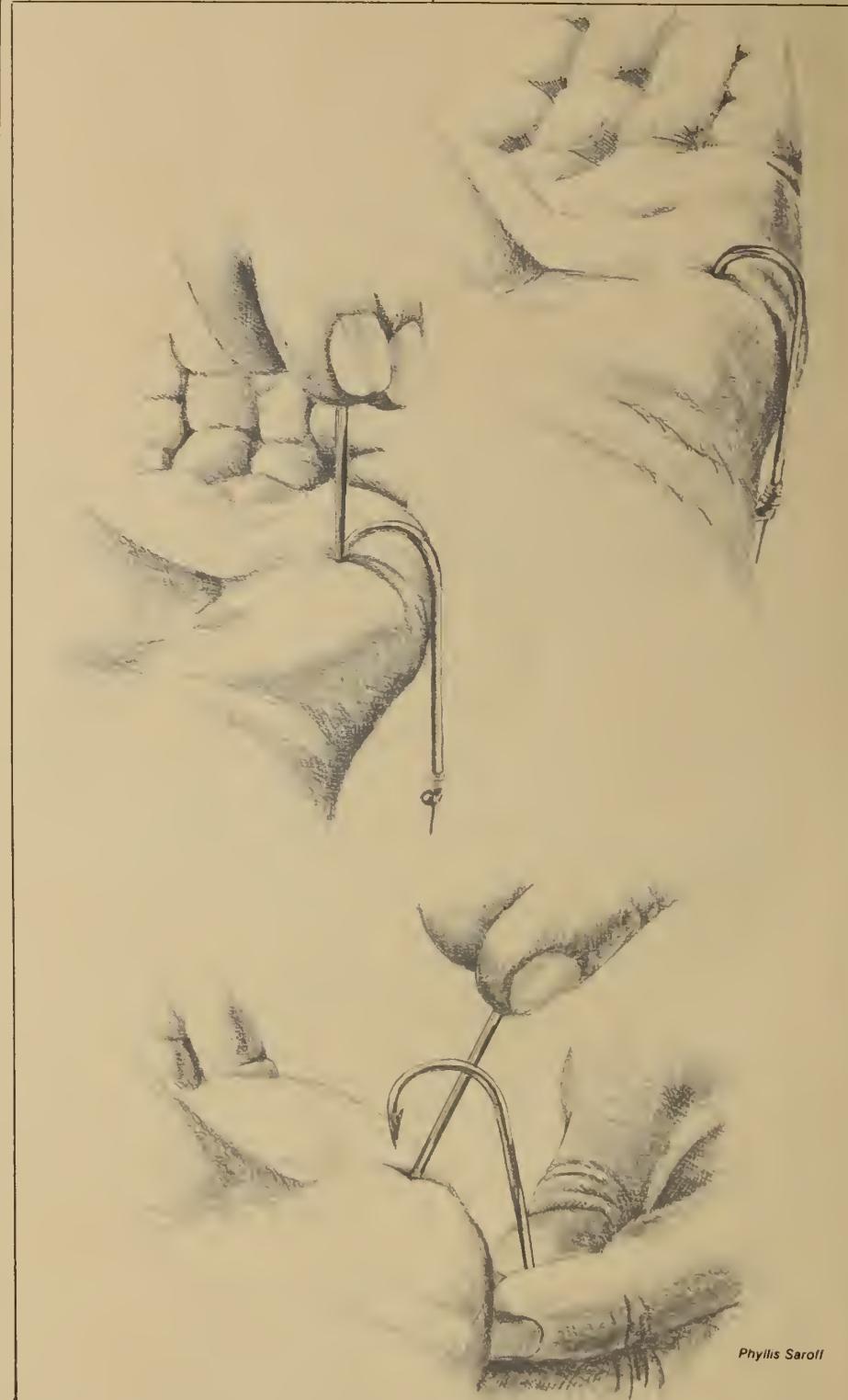
Unknown to most American doctors and fishermen, there is a simple, almost painless way to remove a lodged hook that does not call for the dangerous cutting of flesh or forcibly pulling it out. It's an old Chinese trick, and it works. I've used this simple method of hook extraction on at least a dozen anglers—only two noticed a mild discomfort from the movement of the needle. In all cases, however, the actual hook removal was painless. An added bonus from the Chinese way is that it does not leave a scar.

To begin with, you will need a bottle of antiseptic and a darning or tapestry needle, just a little larger in diameter than the shank of the embedded hook. Most important: the point of the needle must be blunt, or it will create a new wound instead of following the puncture made by the hook. From now on, you should carry these items in your tackle box.

Apply the disinfectant to the hook's puncture.

Carefully insert the sterilized needle alongside the hook. Push the needle in until it is as deep as the point of the hook. Grasp the needle with your thumb and index finger and rotate or move the needle counterclockwise all the way back to the barb. While maintaining the same depth, push outward with the needle in the direction away from the barb. This pushing out moves the flesh away from the troublesome barb; the hook can now be painlessly withdrawn out of that tender flesh. No more spoiled backwoods fishing vacations for Virginia anglers.

The puncture wound should be encouraged to bleed because of the danger of tetanus. The germs are present in dirt. Bleeding can usually be accomplished by squeezing around the puncture. To be safe, the victim should receive an injection of tetanus antitoxin or a tetanus toxoid booster shot.



Tetanus is one affliction not to be taken lightly.

Incidentally, this simple method of hook removal can be practiced on a

piece of meat or clothing. When using cloth, be sure it is drawn taut. After a few tries you will become adept in the art of Chinese needlework. □



The Tackle Box Dilemma

continued from page 34

With this strategy in mind, I hunted up my old boxes, dusted them off, cleaned them out, and decided which had the best trays for saltwater plugs, which had "wormproof" compartments that could hold soft lures without having them melt into a rainbow-colored blob, which would be best for bait fishing gear. A separate box was set aside for striper fishing gear and another for fly rodding accessories.

If you fish for more than one or two species and have more than a small amount of tackle accumulated, this may be a system worth trying. Of course, you'll have to decide for yourself which types of fishing are important enough to you to warrant a separate tackle box. You may not do any saltwater fishing, but have enough big muskie plugs to fill a container on their own, or vice versa.

First drag out all your old tackle boxes. Next, hunt up all the spare lures and fishing gadgets you have stashed away in the closet because you didn't have enough space in your present all-purpose box for them.

Now you're ready to organize. Clean all the empty boxes thoroughly. Use a high-strength household cleaner to accomplish this task. Wipe out the box with wet paper towels afterwards and dry thoroughly.

Next decide what categories of lures and ancillary gear you want to keep in each box. Bait fishing, fly fishing, bass lures, river smallmouth offerings, musky gear, striper lures, and saltwater tackle are some categories that come to mind immediately. If you don't have the right selections

of boxes you may want to buy a new one or two in small or medium sizes to hold the gear for a specific type of fishing. This will still be far cheaper than buying some gargantuan monster to house all your tackle in.

Now start going through your lures and miscellaneous gear, cleaning dirty items, discarding the useless and worn out, snipping bits of line from lures and hooks. Most plastic wrappings and cardboard boxes that lures came from the store in should be discarded. They simply take up space, get wet, and fall apart. If you want to stuff a few lures in your pockets on occasion for a day trip, plastic or metal boxes are designed for this purpose are much better than the flimsy packages lures are purchased in.

Try to put some logic into the arrangement of your gear. Hooks in sequence according to size, all crankbaits on one level of trays, balsa floaters on another, lures you use most often in easily-accessible trays. This makes it much easier to find just what you want when you're out on the river or lake searching for that special weapon that you know will slay the fish.

Of course arranging your tackle in separate small tackle boxes does not mean you'll always be able to pick up just one to take on the boat with you. There may be a day when you expect to baitfish and cast with artificials for bass. In this case you'll need both of these containers.

But with your gear neatly organized and categorized in separate boxes, it will certainly be easier to pinpoint what you want quickly on the water—and you won't have to lug around a suitcase-sized box all day. □



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